

May 27, 2007

“This Is No Contract”  
Galatians 3:15-18

FCF: Fear that God’s love is like ours

**PROPOSITION:** (magnet) Because our salvation is secured in the promise of God,  
(anchor) we must rest in His word and not in our works.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

It’s said by some that we make God in our own image. The sane response to that is to make plain that would be a terrifying prospect. I cannot imagine anything worse than a god like me. These song lyrics speak to this ([READ Andrew Peterson lyric](#)):

*All of my life I’ve held on to this fear  
These thistles and vines ensnare and entwine  
What flowers appeared  
It’s the fear that I’ll fall one too many times  
It’s the fear that His love is no better than mine*

Does that strike a chord somewhere within you? The good news we have to celebrate today is that we are not making God like us but rather that He longs to make us like Him.

**SCRIPTURE READING:** [Galatians 3:15-18](#)

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

Contracts can be good. I remember the joy when the offer on our first house was accepted. After all the haggling, the seller finally agreed to take what we were offering. In times like that, contracts can be good. But what about when the other party will not agree to what you’re offering? What then? When you have what it takes, contracts are great. But when you don’t, having a contract as your sole hope is the last thing you want.

There’s something of that going on here in our text. Paul is pressing on his readers the reality that our standing before God, our justification, is secured “*by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.*” Thus far, he has appealed to their experience and the dynamics of spiritual growth and change. He has appealed to their knowledge of the Old Testament – both its history and teachings. He has stressed that theirs is indeed a sure and a certain hope not because it depends upon our work of feebleness but only because of God’s word of faithfulness – His promises to us and not our labors for Him.

Or, to put it another way, this is no contract. It is a covenant. This is not a conditional agreement between two parties as to who will perform certain obligations and the mutual benefits that will come forth. This is a covenant – in this case, a unilateral covenant. A statement, a promise, by God as to what He will do, the commitment He has made to His people and the way He expects us to respond to His gracious initiative.

Paul’s point to the church of Galatia, to these dear folks who had lost sight of these things, is that our salvation, our standing before God, is secured in nothing more and nothing less than the promise of God. And so it is in His word and not in our works that we should rest. And why? Again, because this is no contract the outcome of which is hinging on us. It is a covenant the fulfillment of which is hinging on God.

Now look with me for just a few minutes, at the features of this covenant and consider the effect, the impact, the implications, that should have upon us.

**I. HOW SOLID IS THIS PROMISE?**

First, a promise has been given. How solid is it? ([READ Galatians 3:15](#))

*A) Background to the Analogy*

An interesting analogy. Let me give you a little background.

1. Legal traditions

The word “covenant” in v.15 should be understood as a “will” or a “testament.” Now in Roman law, such documents could be annulled or changed. But not after death. At that point, it was done. Greek law was a little different. Such documents, once registered, could never be repealed or revoked. They were unalterable from the start.

## 2. Common theme

The point? Either way, there is a time when the terms are settled and cannot be changed.

### B) *Implication of the Analogy*

The implication? Paul is using what we would call a “lesser to greater” argument.

#### 1. If this is so

If this is so, if this among finite fallen men and women is so...

#### 2. How much more this

...how much more is it the case with God? His promises hold and do not change.

### *Application:*

Here’s the thing. God has placed such analogies and illustrations all around us – in creation, history, art, everyday life and experience. And Paul is simply grabbing hold of one here. A promise has been made that cannot be changed. This is no contract. This is a covenant. And in all seriousness, we have to say that, without even knowing what the promise of this covenant is, there is encouragement here. There is so much changing, uncertain, and transient all around us all the time. And yet here, like a bolt from the blue, is this word, this news, that there is something out there unchanging, certain, and secure.

## II. TO WHOM WAS IT MADE?

We have word of a promise that has been made. Well, to whom has it been made? There is some word play here. In v.15, the word needs to be read as “will” or “testament.” In vv.16-18, it shifts to a sense of “covenant” (READ Galatians 3:16-17).

### A) *Immediate Meaning*

There are two layers we need to think through. First, the immediate meaning.

#### 1. Blessed

God’s word to Abraham was that he was going to be richly blessed. He was to be given innumerable offspring and a land. And from him would come a great nation.

#### 2. To be a blessing

Abraham was going to be richly blessed in order that he and his offspring might be a blessing. Both during the course of their days and in the days to come. Both that the nations might see and that a Savior would come through them for them and the nations.

### B) *Ultimate Fulfillment*

Which brings me to the ultimate fulfillment of the promises – to Jesus.

#### 1. A collective noun

“Your offspring” is a collective noun. It has both a plural and singular element to it.

#### 2. The awaited offspring

And Paul uses both, depending on the contexts. Here, he’s stressing the singular. Jesus is the “offspring par excellence.” The hopes and fears of all the years are met in Him.

Ultimately, the promises to Abraham were to Jesus and are fulfilled in Jesus. What does this have to do with us? Simply this. By faith, we are made one with Christ.

### *Application:*

The blessing of and through Abraham has come. And we are secure in Him. The voice coming in the night that accuses you, “You’ve done it again. You sold out. You gave in. You’re such a hypocrite. You’re such a failure. There’s no hope for you.”

And to that voice we can say, “*You’re right. Everything you said is true. And you don’t know the half of it. I am a mess. But I’m His.*” Listen, we can now stand boldly and unashamed before God. How? Because this is no contract. This is a covenant.

### III. WHEN WAS IT GIVEN?

That’s the promise spoken of. That’s what comes by resting in His word and not in our works. And it all comes out even more in its timing (**READ Galatians 3:17-18**).

#### A) Historical Context

When were the promises given? A little Old Testament History is in order here.

##### 1. Summary of Genesis

The promises come to Abraham. From there Isaac, Jacob, and his sons who go to Egypt.

##### 2. Summary of Exodus

Four centuries of slavery transpire. Moses leads them out in the exodus to Mount Sinai where they receive the Ten Commandments. That’s the historical context and sequence.

#### B) Theological Significance

Now the order of the events means something – both for Abraham and for us.

##### 1. For Abraham

The giving of the promises came long before the giving of the law. Clearly then, Abraham was justified before the law, apart from the law, and not because of the law.

##### 2. For us

Which is the same for us. Put in theological terms, the imperative always comes after the indicative. What we do comes only as a consequence, a response to, what God has done.

Now we have a funny way of getting that turned around but it’s true.

#### Application:

Perhaps it’s because of the performance based world in which we live. Perhaps it’s because of the pride of our hearts. But the promises come before the law. What is the law for then? Paul deals with that and so we’ll talk about that next week. The main thing is that this is no contract. This is a covenant. It’s not up to us. It’s up to God.

### CONCLUSION:

Now here’s a question to consider. Would you really want it any other way? Would we really want this laid on us? I think of birthday wishes, the hopes we’re supposed to conjure up as we blow out the candles. I am so glad you cannot read up on that screen what I have wished for through the years. Some just because they were so childish. Some just because they were so selfish, so short-sighted. I am so glad God has not given me what I’ve wanted. I am so glad He hasn’t operated according to a contract, giving me what I wanted or, worse, what I deserved (**READ Andrew Peterson lyric**):

*“All of my life I’ve held on to this fear  
These thistles and vines ensnare and entwine  
What flowers appeared  
It’s the fear that I’ll fall one too many times  
It’s the fear that His love is no better than mine  
(But He tells me that)  
Just as I am and just as I was  
Just as I will be He loves me, He does  
He showed me the day that He shed His own blood  
He loves me, oh, He loves me, He does”*

Hear me, dear ones. This is no contract. Rejoice and be glad for His ways with us are not conditioned on our efforts, intentions, or works. This is no contract. It is a covenant.

**PROPOSITION:** (magnet) Because our salvation is secured in the promise of God,  
(anchor) we must rest in His word and not in our works.