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Welcome to the New Life Podcast, a ministry of New Life Presbyterian Church in Ithaca, New York. Today we have this week's sermon, preached by Tim LaCroix, our senior pastor. Join us for worship each week at 10 o'clock at 950 Danby Road, Ithaca, New York. You can also visit us on our website, [www.newlifeithaca.org](http://www.newlifeithaca.org). Now here's this week's sermon.

00:43

A reading from St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, chapter 3, verses 15 through 25.

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To give a human example, brothers, even with the man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified. Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, to offspring referring to many, but referring to one, and to your offspring, who is Christ. This is what I mean. The law which came 430 years afterward does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God so as to make the promise void.

01:22

For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise, but God gave it to Abraham by a promise. Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one. Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not.

01:51

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 may be given to those who believe. Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come,

02:21

We are no longer under a guardian. This is the word of the Lord.

02:30

Last year I went to Yellowstone and before I went to Yellowstone, I didn't really understand just how deadly the place is. mean, you've probably seen pictures of people trying to take selfies with bison, uh which is very foolish. mean, y'all, a bison is 2,500 pounds. It can run 40 miles an hour and it will charge without a moment's notice. You do not want to take a selfie with a bison.

02:58

It is very dangerous. You've probably seen videos of people trying to do the same with grizzly bears. You do not want to do this. These are wild animals. Yellowstone is a wild area. This is not a domesticated zoo. But one of the things I didn't know was that they have these hot springs. And the hot springs are there because of the fact that Yellowstone is a giant volcano. I mean, you probably knew Old Faithful was there. I'm sure everyone knew Old Faithful was there.

03:26

the geyser and there are other geysers there as well. But Yellowstone is actually a giant caldera, the hole, the volcano where the lava comes out. is, so all around Yellowstone there's about a hundred foot to two hundred foot sheer cliff that encircles it, forty miles in diameter, massive super volcano. I think the last time it erupted it affected the world's climate for about two hundred years. It would not be good if it did erupt. But one of the things that goes on there

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is there's a lot of magma just under the surface. It is constantly heating up pools of water. They're going through these various chambers, and that's how the geysers come. But they also heat up hot springs. Now, I don't know if you're like me, but I love sitting in a hot tub. It's just wonderful to feel the warm water around you. So when I saw these hot springs, I

mean, there's steamy water. It looks very inviting, very inviting. But our tour guide made sure that we knew.

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that we should not go into these hot springs, that in fact, dipping into them for one second would be enough to kill you. And he told us gruesome stories about it, of people going in. Stories that I will not repeat for the sake of you being able to eat bagels later. Now, at that place there are rules and laws. There are uh walkways that you have to stay on. And if you go off those walkways, you are actually breaking the law. And you can be prosecuted.

04:57

And so the tour guide also told us stories of people going off the walkway, trying to get selfies with these geysers, and then they put them up on social media. You know what happens? The FBI finds them and sends them a summons to appear in the court and finds them several thousand dollars. Yeah, they take this very seriously. The rules and laws of Yellowstone are very strict, both to protect and also to protect the nature there. uh

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You were probably familiar with the fact that when you go into a park a national park You can't take anything out with you But one of the things the tour guide told us was that every single elk antler that's been shed and lays along the park They are tagged and if you pick one of those up and try to take it out You will be arrested. They are very serious about their rules and their laws at Yellowstone now Let me now

05:54

shift into a sort of philosophical nature of what the law is. And those of you who are law students will maybe, this may be your favorite sermon of the whole series because we're going to talk a lot about the law and what it is. Let me ask you a question. Do you think anybody goes to Yellowstone so that they can be subject to these really restrictive laws and rules? Does anyone go there so that they can sit under these rules and laws?

06:23

Seems like an obvious question, right? answer is no. No one ever goes to Yellowstone so that they can be subject to these rules and perhaps break one and get arrested and fined thousands of dollars. No one does that. Why do people go to Yellowstone? They go to Yellowstone to see the geysers, to see Old Faithful, to see the bison, to see the elk, to see the hot springs, to see the waterfalls. In other words, they go to Yellowstone to see life and nature and creation. These laws exist not to...

06:51

create life and to create joy. But they exist to protect, right? There's probably, we can think of two reasons why these laws exist. The first law is, the first reason is very obvious. These laws exist to protect people, to make sure that we are protected from our foolishness, so that we will not stray off the path because even though the ground around these hot springs looks solid, most of the places it's only about an inch thick salt, know, crusty salts from the acidic

07:20

hot springs and so you can fall right through without even knowing that you were in danger. These laws exist to protect life but they don't create life. These laws also exist in order to a criminality or to create a crime in order to deter. Without these laws there would not be a crime to go off the path and without that then there would not be a deterrent.

07:48

So that's kind of the two functions of these rules and laws, but I hope it is fairly obvious that no one goes to Yellowstone so that they can be subject to these rules and laws. In fact, I would guess that none of us would like to be subject to these rules and laws. you know, that sort of colored my experience, at least after the first, you know, first couple hours, I was afraid I might break one and I might get a summons to the FBI to appear in court. So we go to Yellowstone to experience life, and these laws and rules do not create life.

08:17

They do have a function. A function is very important. As we come to this text today, we have a very similar argument that Paul is engaging in. He's talking about the law, the purpose of the law, the Mosaic law, and also natural law. He's basically talking about both the Greek notions of law and also the Hebrew notions of the Mosaic law. And he's contrasting it to faith. And essentially that is the entirety of the letter to the Galatians is contrasting the works of the law to faith.

08:48

And as we are in this section of our sermon series, we are in a large section that goes, spans chapter 3 and chapter 4, and it is a section of extended argument. Extended argument to bolster and prove Paul's thesis. Paul's thesis we find at the end of chapter 2 of Galatians. And that thesis is, in verse 16, that we are justified through faith in Jesus Christ and not through works of the law.

09:17

That's his thesis. That we are justified by faith in Jesus Christ and not through the works of the law. After he lays this thesis out, he then goes on and extended nine different arguments. Nine different arguments that are proving his thesis. We've seen two of them so far. The sermon before last, we talked about the first argument, which was an argument from experience. They were saved, the Galatians were saved by faith. Why do they think they need to go back to works?

09:46

The second argument we saw yesterday, which was an appeal to the Abrahamic covenant. We talked about the covenant of Abraham and how we are saved by faith. Today we are continuing in the theme of the Abrahamic covenant and the superiority of it. And we're going to cover two arguments. We actually heard two separate arguments. The first argument is an argument from legal contracts. know, law students will especially have their ears perked. You have a course on contracts, don't you?

10:17

We have an argument from legal contracts and the second one is that we have an argument or an extended discourse on the purpose of the law. And from these two separate arguments, I'm going to pull three points. And that is faith is secure, second faith is superior, and third faith is eternal. First of all, faith is secure. These arguments that Paul is engaging in may seem a little obscure. They may not be very plain.

10:46

at first glance what he's talking about. Let's just dive in. The text is in your bulletin and we're going to start in verse 15. He says to give a human example. He's going to give an example from common life. An example from common life has to do with the law that everyone is subject to, the human law. He says this, even a man-made covenant no one annuls or adds to once it has been

11:15

ratified. Okay? Now, there's some debate and discussion about what, which law he's talking about. Some argue that he's referring to the law of Greek city-states. And the law of Greek city-states, if you make a contract, that contract uh can be amended uh by the testator before he dies. Okay? So we have a covenant here, we have a contract.

11:45

That contract could be amended by the person who made it before that person dies. That's Greek city state law. And then there's also Roman law which said basically once a contract is made and ratified it can't be amended and it cannot be added to. That was the Roman concept. And then there was the Hebraic concept which basically says a covenant or an agreement can be amended or uh nullified.

12:13

if either party agrees. Now, it really doesn't matter which one he's referring to. It seems like he's referring to the Roman concept, which would make sense. He's writing to people who are not Greek necessarily, but are a part of a Roman province. But what's the point? The point is this. He's asserting that once a covenant, once a contract has been made, it can't be changed. What's he referring to? He's referring to the Abrahamic covenant.

12:43

The Abrahamic covenant that Yahweh made with Abraham. We can read about this in Genesis 15. It's also referred to in Genesis 12 and Genesis 17. But read the story of Genesis 15, we see the covenant making between Yahweh, God, the Lord of Israel, and Abraham. That covenant was made. That covenant was ratified. And Paul is saying, look, it can't be changed. It can't be amended. And it cannot be annulled. That covenant still stands. We know this.

13:13

just by appealing to our own concepts of law and what is ethical and true. He continues, now verse 16, the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say and to offspring referring to many, but referring to one and your offspring who is Christ. What is establishing here is that the air

13:38

the person who is going to be the heir of this covenant, this contract, this testament is Jesus, Jesus Christ. That the heir of the promise is Jesus Christ himself. And so this contract involves three parties. God, Abraham, and his offspring, Christ. Those are the parties. And what Paul is saying is, those are the people who have interested in this covenant, those are the people who could amend it or not, and

14:07

Because Abraham has died long ago and he didn't amend it, it can't be amended. It's secure. The covenant of with God and Abraham, the Abrahamic covenant that we've been talking about is a covenant of promise. It's the covenant of faith where Abraham is justified by faith. The Abrahamic promise by which Gentiles come into the family of God. I think most of us are Gentiles. There may be some of us with some Jewish heritage, but most of us are probably Gentiles. The way that the Gentiles are coming in,

14:37

to the family of God established in Genesis chapter 12 verse 3 is through the Abrahamic covenant, the covenant of promise, which is a covenant of faith. Paul's point is this cannot be amended. It cannot be annulled because it has been ratified and the person who has made it with Abraham is long gone. This is what it says in verse 17. He says, this is what I mean. You can tell he's...

15:02

He's in some obscure argument if he has to kind of come back and say something like, this is what I mean. The law, he says, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul. What is he talking about? He's talking about the law of Moses, giving it sign eye. 430 years later, that law does not change the Abrahamic covenant. It does not annul it, he says. It does not amend it. And so, what we see is that that Abrahamic promise is secure.

15:32

The counter, the other side of this is that the implication is that the law is insecure. And I think we know this in our lives. That the law is not a reliable thing to depend on. Our own human effort is not a reliable thing to depend on. We talked about this last week. We talked about the gerbil wheel of performance.

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It is not dependable. It is not secure. We cannot depend on our own effort, on our own ability to obey perfectly. We can't depend on that. It's a very insecure position to depend on your own effort, your own performance, to either please God or secure your happiness. Paul's argument is, faith is secure.

16:19

That covenant is not changing, that contract is not going to be annulled, it is not going to be amended. You can depend on that. The promise is that we are justified by faith. We are justified by trust in God. As we saw last week, we are justified because Christ took on our curse and gave us His righteousness. And so, faith is secure. The law is insecure. So we move to the second point, and that is faith.



16:48

is superior. Faith is superior. Now this is all throughout the passage, but if we continue, you know, given the fact that this Abrahamic promise is the one that promises the Gentiles will become a part of the people of God. The Abrahamic promise is the one that's secure. That alone tells us that it is superior. But as we continue on in the passage, in verse 18, Paul writes,

17:17

But if the inheritance comes by the law, it is no longer by promise. But God gave it to Abraham by a promise. So, he says this in a similar fashion a little bit later. He says, if the law could bring a life, then if there was a law that had been given that could give life, this is in verse 21, then righteousness would indeed have been by the law.

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Two ways of saying that. This has been said earlier in Galatians, where Paul basically says, look, if the law could justify us, if the law could give us life, then Christ died for no purpose, right? If the law could provide life, if we could attain life, justification, eternal life, peace through our own performance, then as one commentator said, and I quoted this to you, the sacrifice of Christ was the stupidest thing that ever occurred in all of human history.

18:15

Because if we could do it by our effort, then why did he die? He died because we can't. He died because we can't. And this makes faith superior to the law. So then he goes into this verse 19 discourse about what the law is. We learn more about its faith superiority and the law's inferiority. He says, why the law? Why do we have the law then? If faith is secure and the law is insecure,

18:45

If faith is superior and the law is inferior, why do we have the law in the first place? He says it was added because of transgressions. OK, does anyone know what that means? These two verses, 19 and 20, are very obscure. Let me try to pull it out for you a little bit. What it

says when it is added because of transgressions, the preposition says, literally says it was added for the purpose of transgressions.

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Okay, that solves it, that clears it up very nicely, doesn't it? How is the law added for the purpose of transgression? Well, this goes back to the illustration about Yellowstone, right? Why do these laws and rules exist at Yellowstone? They exist for two reasons. To protect us, and also to provide illegal criminality as a deterrent. And so Paul is actually appealing both to Hebrews and to Greco-Romans because...

19:42

In Greek philosophy, the law was held at a very high regard. The law was viewed as something that guarded the state, that guided the state, the city state. And so it is held at very high regard. Paul is saying that the law was given in order to point out when we're wrong. Because without a law, nothing will point out that we're wrong. If those laws didn't exist in Yellowstone,

20:08

People could walk off the trail and they wouldn't be in legal trouble, which would take away from the deterrent. And so what we find here is in Christian theology, and Paul is alluding to both of these right here, there are two uses of the law. There's actually three which we won't get into until a little later. But the two uses of the law that both Calvin and Luther teach are first. The law is given in order to restrain evil in the world. Okay? That's the first use.

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That's the example of the reason why the law is given in Yellowstone, is to restrain us from going off the path and hurting ourselves. It's to restrain evil in the world. This is why the Greeks held the law in high esteem. They understood that the law was given. They believed by divine source to restrain evil in the world. So that's what it means by because of transgressions. It is to restrain evil in the world. Without a law, there wouldn't be things to transgress.

21:07

and people would do whatever they want. So it restrains evil in the world. But the second reason that the law was given was in order to point out our sin, to point out our need for God. And this I think is what Paul is really leaning into. And most of the quotes that I have for you on page three are about this. The law was given in order to point out our need for grace, for the gospel. St. Chrysostom said this.

21:36

The law was given to probe our wounds that we might long for a physician. And that sounds painful, right? If you have a wound and someone probes it, that hurts. But why? Why was that given to do that? Because without that, we won't long for a physician. We won't long for healing. Maybe some of you are like me. I'm uh this typical guy that does not go to the doctor. I'm a little better at it than I used to be, because I'm getting older.

22:04

I got a primary care physician. But for about 10 or 15 years, Rachel could probably tell you exactly, I didn't have a primary care physician. I never went to the doctor. And if something happened, it was emergency room or urgent care. um One time, ah this was when I was in grad school, I was a Sunday afternoon and I started getting this incredible pain in my abdomen. mean, searing, burning pain all over my abdomen. And it lasted for about 10 hours, you know?

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And Rachel's like, we should go, we should go. No, I'm good, I'm good. I'm good. I'm good. I'm gonna pass this. I think it's kidney stone. We'll just, we'll get through it. I'm not gonna go to see the physician. About 10 hours after that started, it stopped. ah But then the next few days I started, I was nauseated. And I was nauseated for day after day. And I didn't go to class, I didn't go to work. That Thursday was Thanksgiving. And those of you who have been with me around Thanksgiving know.

23:00

Just how I love Thanksgiving. Well, that Thanksgiving, all I did was push my food around my plate. I didn't eat hardly anything. That night, my wife was talking to her mother, and her mother says, you need to take him to the hospital or you're going to wake up beside a dead man. So the next day, we went to the hospital. What? She said that. Rachel tells me this. It puts the fear of God in me. We go to the hospital. Turns out, I had ruptured my appendix a week before.

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For a solid week, my appendix was ruptured. was infecting and infesting my whole entire insides. So they took it out, they cleaned me out. I ended up being in the hospital for two weeks in the ICU because I had to recover not only from the appendicitis, but also from the sepsis that had developed. know, I did not feel my need for a physician, I? But the reality is, this is the truth about our souls, right?

23:59

The truth about our souls is that we are in sepsis. We don't see it. We don't see it, we don't know it. But that's our reality. We need a physician. The purpose of the law is to point this out. To point it out like Rachel's pointed, let's go to the hospital. ah And so we need this. We need this in our lives. We need this in our hearts. This is why Chrysostom says the law was given to probe our wounds that we might long for a physician.

24:29

Some more quotes on that page. F.F. Bruce said, the law cannot itself impart life. Just like the laws at Yellowstone do not make anybody have fun or enjoy the place. The law itself cannot impart life, but by showing the bankruptcy of human effort, it shuts men and women up to the grace of God as their only hope. John Stott said it this way, no man has ever appreciated the gospel until the law first revealed to

24:57

revealed him to himself until the law revealed to me just how bad I am, just how in sepsis my soul is. He says, it is only against the icky blackness of the night sky that the stars begin to appear. It is only against the dark background of sin and judgment that the gospel shines

forth. I said this before, I'll say it again. One of the main hindrances to the gospel in this day and age is people don't feel like they need it.

25:28

They don't need it. We have so much. We have wealth. have medical care. We have everything we could ever want or ask for. People simply don't feel their need for God. How is it that people will feel their need for God? They may go through some crisis like their appendix ruptures and they almost die. know, they'll cry out for God. So that may happen. But the reality is, is that what people need is they need for the law to come in and shine on us and show us our need for God.

25:57

And this is what it means that the law was added on top of the Abrahamic covenant. It doesn't amend it, it doesn't annul it. It was added on top to show us how much we need that promise. We need that justification. We need the promise that was promised, the blessing that was promised to Abraham. The law was added to show us how much we need it. That's why it was added because of transgressions. And that's why faith is superior because the law serves

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as a servant to faith. This is what it also says in verse 23. Actually verse 24, the law was our guardian until Christ came. Paul actually says that the law serves like a babysitter. That may be the closest analog to this word guardian. The Greek word is pedagogue. To us a pedagogue is a teacher, but in ancient Greco-Roman world a pedagogue was not a teacher.

26:55

It was an indentured servant that would lead a child to school. Pedagogue literally means a child leader, a boy leader. Lead them to school, take them to school, make sure they go to school, maybe rehearse the lessons after school. You know, basically be a babysitter and a guardian while that child is in minority. And when the child becomes an adult, they no longer need the guardian. This is what Paul is saying. Look, the law as a servant...

27:24

to the gospel. The law is a guardian while we are in our spiritual minority and once we have come to maturity we understand our wounds, we understand the depth of our sin, we have faith in Christ and we move to adulthood. The law is inferior to the gospel but it is not itself something that is uh to be rejected. It serves a purpose. serves a purpose. So faith is superior.

27:53

The law is inferior, that's the second point. Then we'll finish with the third point. Faith is eternal. The Mosaic law, the law is temporal. It's temporal. This is probably the most astounding radical thing that Paul asserts. You see the ancient uh Jews believed that the Torah was eternal. It would last forever. Paul makes the assertion here that it is temporary. That it is temporary. He says in verse 23,

28:22

Well, starting in verse 22. But Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. So look, the law is imprisoning us under sin, so that we will have faith in Jesus Christ, so that we will know our need for God. And in verse 23 it says, Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned, until the coming faith would be revealed. So then,

28:50

The law was our guardian until Christ came in order that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian. Paul is making the radical claim that we are no longer under the law. This would have been astounding for any Jewish person, especially a Pharisee, someone had trained under the highest, greatest teachers of that era to say. The law is temporary. It serves a purpose. What is that purpose? That purpose...

29:19

is to show us our need for the promise. To show us our need for life which comes through faith. But it is temporary. What is eternal? Faith is eternal. The promise of Abraham is

eternal. The heir of Abraham, his offspring Christ, is eternal. His salvation lasts forever. He has ascended into heaven. He sits on the right hand of the Father. He will rule and reign over all things forever.

29:47

He will recreate this world, a new heaven and a new earth, where we will experience life without sin or pain forever. Faith is forever. The law is temporary. And that's another reason why we do not put our trust, we do not put our significance in our own effort, in our performance, in our achievement, in our ability uh to obey the law or rules. We place our significance in Christ.

30:16

and our faith and trust in Him because faith is secure, faith is superior, and faith is eternal.

30:26

Tim Keller said this and we'll close with it. This is the last quote on page three. He says, people want a sense of joy and acceptance, but they will not admit the seriousness of their sin. How many people want joy and acceptance? think probably everybody wants joy and acceptance. Everybody wants it. But we're not willing to admit the seriousness of our sin, which can lead to that.

30:53

He says, will not listen to the law's searching, painful analysis of their lives and hearts. But unless we see how helpless and profoundly sinful we are, unless we see that our souls are septic, the message of salvation will not be exhilarating or liberating. Unless we know how big our debt is, we cannot have any idea of how great Christ's payment was. If we do not think we are all that bad, the idea of grace...

31:21

will not change us. And this is why the charge that Paul was an enemy of Torah is a lie. Paul actually places the law in its proper place. It serves the promise. It plays that role. And that

is a role that Jesus says, I have not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it. The irony is that Paul is doing what his opponents are accusing.

31:47

Him of, and they are doing exactly what they are accusing Him of. They are the ones who are contradicting the law because they are holding the Abrahamic promise and the Mosaic law to both be in effect and contradict each other. Paul says no. The promise of Abraham is superior. The promise of Abraham is secure. It is eternal. The law serves that. It points out our need for Christ. It points out our need for Him. And we're never going to experience the joy and acceptance that we all long for until we allow that law.

32:17

to peer into our hearts and souls and show us how much we need a physician to allow it to probe our wounds that we might long for a physician. This is the purpose of the law. But faith is what is secure. Faith is what is superior. And faith is what is eternal. So we are justified by faith. We depend on Christ for our life. Let's pray.

32:41

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