

Part 7: Terms and Conditions

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The book of Galatians is Paul's theological wonder pill to the church. Martin Luther once said that in it Paul breathes fire. And we've been through that fire. He's dipped deeply into the theology of the Old Testament, he's called us to consider the nature of justification and sanctification. And now, as our heads may be spinning he throws us a lifeline: "To give a human example brothers."

Paul, wanting to clarify and simplify things for us humans—begins this next passage with one of the most common experiences in humanity: terms and conditions. In our technological age, we accept terms and conditions every day from opening bank accounts, to fantasy football leagues. In fact, they are so common that we don't even read them anymore. One study concluded that only 9% of consumers read the terms and conditions before they accept them.

The terms refer to the promise of what is provided, and the conditions indicate what's required for that to be true. We generally don't read these anymore because we can't imagine AllRecipe's conditions include a huge catch in order for us to be rewarded with the terms of a new Buffalo Dip recipe.

But the Jews, and the Judaized Christians in Galatia read the terms and conditions of God's promised salvation. Or so they thought. In reading the Old Testament they believed that if they were to receive the term of God's promise to Abraham, a land and a blessing beyond their wildest dreams—they had to meet the conditions of the Old Testament law. They had to live like a Jew.

But Paul just blew up everything they thought about the conditions. In **Galatians 3:14**, he said that the terms of Abraham's blessings are awarded to the Gentiles on the condition of faith in Christ Jesus.

It's statements like this that make us glad we kept our receipts. If Paul's right—they didn't meet the conditions, and therefore they don't get the reward.

Paul knows what he said, and he knows that every Christian who had been living like a Jew just pulled out their receipt: "What do you mean faith in Jesus alone! Those aren't the conditions! What about the Law! What about Moses! Look here, we've read the terms and conditions and those Gentiles haven't met them! If you want God's salvation, you've got to have Jesus and you've got to keep the law."

That's why the title of our sermon today is "Terms and Conditions." We only care about those things when we feel we need them—they bring us confidence when we lack it, and if we are confused about them, they can bring a lot of pain and frustration into our lives.

How is one saved? What confidence can you have that you are saved? What are the terms and conditions to truly receive God's promise? Paul isn't going to let you check the box without reading it. And our main point today is this: **"The promise of God comes to us on one condition."**

He's going to walk us through God's promise in three ways. First, we'll see **God's Unconditional Promise**, then **The Law's Conditional Purpose**, and lastly **The Conditions of Salvation**.

With that said, back to Paul's attempt to simplify things: **Galatians 3:15-18**, "To give a human example, brothers: even with a 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, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ."

Paul opens by noting where we get things wrong at the start, God's promise was always unconditional. That's our first point: **God's Unconditional Promise**.

Paul mixes a lot of metaphors in our passage using words like covenant, promise, inheritance and heir. But all of them are common man-made agreements which involve terms of promise and conditions of awards.

The best example that includes all these themes is someone's last will and testament. The conditions can be something like this, "When I die," and the terms are, "you get the car." Or "When I die, and if you've started a family," the terms, "you get the house."

But unlike a will, which can be amended and altered before you pass away—Paul adds the language of "covenant." Paul reaches back and uses this Old Testament word which implies something that can't be changed once it has been agreed upon. A biblical example of this would be Darius' decree to throw into the lion's den any Jew who prayed to God. Despite his love for Daniel, he couldn't change his covenant.

And if we have a category for such commitments then how much more, says Paul, is God able to keep his own word. Before we move on, I want to pause for a moment on how Paul's argument should influence our own thoughts on God.

Notice how Paul's example assumes honesty and justice among humans. Then he takes those obvious character traits and multiplies them to God. He moves from the lesser example of human faithfulness and says, "Well, God is even more faithful and honest than that."

But I think it's all too common to reverse the logic. We like to assume the best of men, and the worst of God. Instead of taking man's goodness and multiplying it to God—we are more prone to taking man's weakness and faults and multiplying them unto God.

If I can fall out of favor with my boss, how much more can I fall out of favor with God. If my father abused me with his authority--how much more abusive must the discipline of God be.

But Paul helps frame our thoughts differently. Unlike other pagan gods, or the gods of our own imagination—the God of the Bible is not the magnification of humanity's strengths and weaknesses. Human leaders and human powers can often multiply what's good about man—but we also know how they can magnify what is terrible about man. God is not like that. God meets, exceeds, and far surpasses the best attributes of humanity with none of our faults. Better than our best, wiser than our wise, more glorious and honorable than our wildest dreams.

And if we forget this it's no wonder than we begin to misread God's terms and conditions. Sinful man often makes bad promises, incomplete promises, or promises that require two parties of equal responsibility. But this God is not like us. God and his promises are rooted in his unparalleled power, glory and majesty.

We've all heard stories of mafia type extortion. Some businessman's shop is constantly vandalized. But one day, a gentleman walks in and says--"Would you like me to get those guys to stop." The shop owner couldn't believe his luck. But he's nervous, and he says, "Yeah, but what's it going to cost me?" The man looks shocked, "Nothing! I'm a community man myself; I've been where you've been and I know these kids. Just let me go investigate it for you. And I know you'd do the same for me. "

So, the stranger leaves, and sure enough, the vandalism stops. But one day the man returns to the store. He asks the owner about the boys and is thrilled to hear everything is for the better. But then the man says, "You know I'm so glad. And I was happy to do it. But there's one thing, I've got some men tonight who are going to be using your loading bay--it would be great if you could just, not tell anyone. Because, after all, you wouldn't even have this business if it wasn't for me. We community guys have to look out for each other."

And now the owner is trapped. He thought the terms of salvation were free, but it came with a condition, one that wasn't known until after the promise was already ratified.

It's not uncommon to view God this way. Perhaps you come to him and accept the offer of free grace, but when you wake up in the morning and start reading you start seeing calls to obedience, rules and commands. Did God extort you? Did he offer you free grace only to turn around and trap you with the chains of performance?

It's an old experience. It's how these Christians in Galatia were beginning to feel. They took Christ, but now these false teachers are saying they had to keep the law as well. But Paul blows this out of the water on two levels. The first was God's surpassing morality—he's no extortioner or conman. The second is God's own acting in history. Scripture shows God didn't do this.

He goes to Genesis 12, which is where we will pick up our series in Genesis, and reminds them of the origin of promise. Promises were made to Abraham. Abraham didn't make any promises. Abraham didn't ask God for anything. Abraham wasn't sniffing in the right direction. Abraham was complacently content far from Canaan, with a barren wife and a complicated religious background. But God showed up and God said: "Listen up, I'm going to be your God. I'm going to bring you into a land. I'm going to bless you and through you all the nations will be blessed."

The origin of God's promise was God's will, not Abraham's ability to meet any condition.

Paul also reminds us that the law came 430 years after the promise. If God's promise were the terms, and the law the conditions it would be like saying the terms of American Independence in 1776 were dependent upon stipulations yet to be given in the year 2206. Abraham received the promise way before Moses and the post-Exodus people of God received the law. The conditions of the promise were the promise itself. The promise, as it related to Abraham, was unconditional.

Well, then, what was the relationship between the promise and the law? "That's a good question," says Paul! Why do we have all these rules?

To understand this, Paul introduces our second point: **The Law's Conditional Purpose.**

The promise was unconditional. The law, while having conditions inside of it, was itself conditional. He shows this by assuming two arguments.

The first argument is this: "Well, if the law wasn't a result of God's cruelty to change the conditions—was it a result of his incapability to provide the terms of promise?" Did God make a promise he wasn't able to cash? Did God end up realizing he needed Abraham's help to get him the land and the blessing? Does the law mean God needs your help?

Paul's answer is a resounding, "No." **Galatians 3:19a**, "Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions."

Why the law? Because of sin. The promise reveals God's perfect nature—the law highlights our imperfect and fallen hearts. The law doesn't point to the imperfection of the promise—but the imperfect trust and dangerous life in God's promised people. The promise was perfect—but sin causes us to doubt it.

Do you remember that cultural moment when McDonald's had to write on all their coffee cups, "Warning: Contents May Be Hot"? We all laughed because that seemed self-evident. But apparently it wasn't. We need help realizing that we are often dumb and our world is often dangerous. Sin makes us seem infinitely wise and itself infinitely safe.

The law put a warning label back on sin because we needed it. The law outlined the distinctions of God's people in order to highlight the dangers of the sinful nations and practices that surrounded them. It was the "burner is hot" light on your stove that is meant to remind you that touching sin always burns. It restricted God's promised people in order to preserve them for the promise.

Most of us are unaware of the depth of our sin, how it harms us, and how it harms others—but the law spells out in detail what it looked like for the Jews—and even for us today what it looks like in principle.

The law didn't come because God's promise needed help—it came because we needed help seeing and staying away from sin. It put warning labels on things we foolishly assume as safe and painfully endure as damaging.

"Ok", we say, "But the law really does have conditions right? It says stuff like, 'If you obey these laws and keep them it will go well with you in the land?' If the law isn't because God is incapable—is it because he's conflicted? Are there two promises? One in the promise and one in the law?"

"No!" Paul says, this: **Galatians 3:19-21**, "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! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law."

Paul says the law is like the project partner you least want to work with—he's the last one to show up, and the first one to leave. Not because it's not good—but because that's what it was designed to do. The righteousness you need would never come from the law. It wasn't needed at the start, and it won't be needed in the end.

The law was waiting for that one offspring, the one to whom God was going to bring all the terms of the covenant to pass upon. And once that offspring came—the law would go away and there would be a new security system in place.

The law did provide a certain kind of security. It helped people live righteously. But it did so to the promise only in the way water wings work in relationship to a life vest.

Those water wings and puddle jumpers you put on your kids at Splash Montana are great. But if you look at them closely, if you read the terms and conditions, you'll see something: "Do not use as a life preserver."

Clumsy at times? Yeah for sure. Unwanted at times by kids? Absolutely. Helpful to keep your head above water should you slip? Maybe? Able to keep you alive in the event of a catastrophic flood? Not on your life. Why? It wasn't made to.

The law had terms and conditions--and behind those terms and conditions was the perfect righteousness of God and the condemnation of sin. The law could never save us from ultimate judgement because the law could never give perfect righteousness.

So, we might ask of the law, "What exactly do you do here?" And more importantly for us as Christians, what do we make of the law? How does the law serve us if we aren't made to serve the law?

All of these will be answered in our last point: **The Conditions of Salvation.**

We keep our receipts and we file away our contracts because we want the comfort and assurance that comes from them. That's a good and basic desire. We want the assurance that we've met those conditions and will be awarded those terms of salvation.

But Paul is saying to the Galatians and to us that if your ability to keep the law or your own performance is the receipt you keep checking for confidence—you're going to be devastated. It's not the receipt you want to keep—but instead it points us back to the promise that God himself keeps. The law serves the promise.

How? It keeps us alive. Dead men don't receive an inheritance. The law outlined the physical danger and death that often accompanied it. The law also outlined the spiritual death that our hearts are born into. Just like the Jews, our hearts are dead to God's promise—we don't want to believe it and instead we accept the terms and conditions of sin in hopes that they might provide what it seems God could not.

Spiritually dead people sin, and sinful people die. And the law reminds us that there's nothing in this world, nor in our own obedience which can make us undead. It points us to the problem to preserve us for the promise.

Here's how Paul puts this: **Galatians 3:22-24**, "But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might 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."

The law was God's means to imprison everything under sin.

What does this mean? Have you ever asked yourself out of frustration or disbelief, “What’s his deal?” The law tells us: sin. Have you ever asked yourself after a failed attempt of self-improvement, “What’s wrong with me?” The law tells us: sin. Have you ever asked yourself, “What in the world is wrong with the world?” The law tells us: sin.

If you’re hunting and you wander onto private property, you won’t know you’re in the wrong until you see a sign posted in front of you. That sign imprisoned you—but you were already a prisoner. It just pointed out the problem you were previously unaware of.

Paul describes this more in the book of Romans. Religious or not, why do we often have a conflicted conscience, why does no one have to teach us guilt and shame, why is injustice so rampant in our world? Scripture tells us: sin. Because God’s righteousness is impressed in every image bearer in the whole world—sin provokes the truth about how our own righteousness, and the righteousness in our world isn’t good enough.

So what do we do? We create our own conditions. In order to receive the terms of feeling good, I must meet the condition of being successful. In order to be awarded the terms of peace, the world must meet the terms of never crossing me and never wronging me. In order for you to feel accepted by me, you must meet the terms I give you.

But when we make terms, and other people make terms, it imprisons us all under obligations we can never meet in hopes of a promise our conditions can never provide. We look to the conditions of the law as a deliverer—but Paul reminds us it’s nothing but a jailor.

The law reminds us that we aren't perfect—but our God is. He is what we aren't. And that's why we must trust in his promise, and not our performance.

The law tells us what’s wrong, but it also hints at what is right. Paul uses the illustration of a guardian or a tutor. This was a common position in Paul's world where young children would be entrusted to a teacher who was just a hired hand. They taught good things, but they were rough, they didn't love them, and while their teaching might help the child manage their inheritance well—they never had the capacity to grant the inheritance.

But why does the law imprison us? And why does it teach us so roughly? In order that it might lead us back to the man of promise: Jesus Christ the one who frees us, and the Father who loves us.

Martin Luther said it best this way: "Some people will say that the law is divine and holy. Let the law have its glory, but no law, however divine and holy, should teach me that I am justified and will live by it. I grant it may teach me that I should love God and my neighbor; also to live in chastity, sobriety, patience, and so on. But it ought not to show me how I can be delivered from sin, the devil, death, and hell."

The conditions we need to inherit God’s promise is that we must not be dead. We must be alive. But God knew this, he’s infinitely wise. Which means that his promise is never made to those who think themselves alive by any other standard. His promise is not for those who think themselves perfect and righteous—he never made his promise to a righteous person.

The law points us to the promise because it reminds us of Abraham's condition when he received it, and when we received it: we didn't deserve it. A Holy God made a covenant to an unholy people. A living God made a promise to a spiritually dead people.

How then might we who are unholy have confidence that we are right with a holy God? How might we who are dead in our sins have confidence that we are alive to enjoy the promise of life?

On what condition do we have confidence if it seems there are no conditions? On the one condition that God gave—the one offspring who would fulfill the law, the one offspring who was the heir, the one offspring who wasn't born dead, but born to die, the one offspring who had no sin, but for our sake was made to be sin, the one offspring who was himself the righteousness of God.

Where do we look for confidence and belonging? What is the receipt we reach for in order to claim to terms of promise? Not the law, not your works, not your social standing—but Christ, and Christ alone.

Paul says it this way, **Galatians 3:25-28**: "But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Do you see the beauty of what Paul has done? Paul has walked us through the wonderful beauty of God's unconditional promise. But he doesn't leave us with unconditional confidence.

This is why we keep our receipts. We want to be able to say, "See here, I know what I have, and I know what it awards to me." Paul knows this church in Galatia, and every Christian since, wants that kind of confidence. He wants you to be certain that you've met the conditions—but what then do we point to for our own confidence?

Do you feel like you're accepted by God and awarded the terms of his salvation because you're righteous? Will you hold up to him your track record of good works? Jesus says, "I came not for the righteous, but the unrighteous." If your confidence is in the receipt of your own righteousness—whatever you have it is not Christian confidence. Will you hold up the receipt of youthful strength and a life of relative ease as a sign of God's favor? Jesus says, "I came not to call the healthy, but the sick." Good health and cheer is no receipt for Christian confidence. Do you qualify for God's promise because you're doing well, you're always conquering, always winning, and never fading? Jesus says, "Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Self-determination and endless victory is no qualification for Christian confidence.

But Christ is. A Christ who fulfills the law, and who shares himself with us is a Christ to be participated in not by works of the flesh symbolized in circumcision. But by faith in Jesus alone symbolized in baptism. Baptism, like a wedding ring, is the Christian's reminder of the promise in which they already stand. And unlike circumcision, it is a sign given to any gender, of any nationality, of any standing—so long as they have taken Christ in faith.

That's the receipt you must look for, and that's the confidence we must point others to as well. Salvation is the terms, and the gospel is the condition, and God's sticking to it. Will you?