

Sunday, July 12, 2026 Sunday Morning Worship Sermon
“Given Through the Promise” Pastor Takaaki Inoue
Galatians 3:21–29, Matthew 20:9–16

① [The Problem at the Church in Galatia: The Force Pushing Them to Return to the Law] Paul was not a teacher who stayed in one place to preach and pastor; rather, he was a teacher who traveled from place to place to preach. He undertook three missionary journeys during his lifetime. He preached in the region of Syria along the Mediterranean coast, in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), and in Greece. In Asia Minor, churches such as the Galatian, Ephesian, and Colossian churches were established, while in Greece, the Thessalonian and Philippian churches were founded. Since he would leave for another region to preach as soon as he had established a church, the churches were left without a teacher. As a result, various problems would quickly arise within those churches—such as the introduction of false teachings about the gospel, internal conflicts, and issues regarding how to relate to pagans. So Paul wrote letters to these churches to provide guidance. These letters were compiled and included in the New Testament as the “Epistles of Paul.” Therefore, please consider Paul’s letters to be “teachings of orthodox faith against heresy” and “guidelines for the life of faith.”

Since the Letter to the Galatians is addressed “To the churches in Galatia” (Galatians 1:2), we can see that it was circulated among those churches. As for the problem facing the Galatian church, it lay in the fact that false teachers who had come after Paul claimed, “He is not an apostle,” and preached a different Christ and a different gospel from what Paul had taught. Therefore, Paul said, “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel” (Galatians 1:6), and he even went so far as to issue a curse, stating, “May anyone who preaches a gospel contrary to what you received be accursed.” (1:9) This “different gospel” refers to the teaching that one cannot be saved by Christ alone, but must “live like a Jew, be circumcised, and perform the ritual of handwashing” to be saved. It is an effort to force a return to Jewish legalism. In contrast, the church in Corinth faced the problem of the teaching introduced by false teachers: “Everything is permissible for me” (1 Corinthians 6:12). It seems everyone was proclaiming this in unison. Even today, these two teachings continue to appear in different forms.

● In the 2014 Sewol ferry sinking in South Korea, in which 300 students on a school trip lost their lives, it was revealed that 90 percent of the ship’s crew were followers of the “Salvation Sect.” The Salvation Sect is currently divided into three groups: the Good News Mission, the Christian Gospel Baptist Church, and the Word of Life Mission. Their teachings state: “Repeated repentance is proof that one is not saved, and there is no need to repent. Sins committed by the saved do not

count as sins. Since the Law has been completely abolished, committing acts such as theft, murder, or adultery does not constitute sin.” This is problematic. The church in Corinth was the same. Jesus said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matthew 5:17). The Law is a good thing established by God. It is to be kept not by one’s own strength, but by the power of Christ (the Holy Spirit). That is what it means to fulfill it.

There are teachers who pit the Law against the Gospel, misinterpreting the Law as “works” and the Gospel as “faith,” and teach that it is not necessary to keep the Law—that simply believing is enough. This makes them heretics, just like the “Salvation-Only” sect. If faith alone were sufficient, why was the Epistle of James included in the canon? Moreover, in the Eastern Church, the Epistle of James is regarded as the second most important book after the Acts of the Apostles, and Paul’s epistles are placed after these catholic epistles (the letters of James, Peter, and John). Furthermore, in the latter parts of his letters, Paul consistently speaks of works. Jesus also said, “Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.” (Matthew 7:26), commanding us not only to believe but also to act. Faith and works are not to be set in opposition to one another; they coexist. When Paul says, “We are not saved by the works of the law,” he means that “people are not saved by their own strength”; and when he says, “We are saved by the gospel,” he means that people are saved through Christ. He wanted to say that we should rely on the power of Christ, not on our own strength.

② **【Christianity is, at its core, a religion of promises.】**

Starting in Chapter 3, Verse 16, Paul speaks about “the Law and the Promise.” He is saying that Christianity is, at its core, “the religion of God’s promises.” We can see this clearly in the story of Abraham. God promised Abraham that He would give him a land and descendants. He heard this promise when he was 75 years old. However, as he grew older without a child and became anxious, he fathered an heir not with his wife Sarah, but with his maidservant Hagar. Ishmael, born through this human scheme, is the ancestor of today’s Arabs. But when Abraham turned 100, the promised son Isaac was born, and it was this promised son who became his heir. “All the nations of the earth will be blessed through your offspring.” (Genesis 26:4) This promise—the Abrahamic Covenant—was passed down from Abraham to Isaac and then to Jacob. Paul writes that the Law was established 430 years after this Abrahamic Covenant. The “promise” came first, and the “Law” came later. Therefore, he argues that all nations enter into blessing through Christ, who is a descendant of Abraham, and not by keeping and observing the Law.

③ **【The Role of the Law】**

In verses 19 through 25, Paul discusses “the role of the Law.” He explains that the Law was given to reveal our transgressions. In other words, it exists to make us realize that we cannot save ourselves, others, or society through our own strength. However, the Jews used the Law not to recognize their own powerlessness, but to justify their own superiority and to look down on other nations. It is precisely because we realize our own powerlessness that we need Christ. Those who think they have power within themselves do not need Christ. This remains true even today. If there are Christians who believe they can change or save people and society through human power alone, such people are not Christians—they are Jews.

④ **【It is only through Christ that people become children of God.】**

“For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” (Galatians 3:26–27) Through baptism, we have been united with Christ and have become one with Him. Baptism is a wedding ceremony with Christ. I have become part of the body of Christ. This is true not only for me, but for people of every nation, both men and women, and people of every social status. By being united with Christ, we become entirely new people—children of God. In the past, people of any nation could become Jews by following Jewish customs, but we become Christians through baptism. Paul is thoroughly Christ-centered. Whether or not we are united with Christ is the key to salvation.

Finally, I mentioned earlier that Christianity is “the religion of God’s promises.” The archangel Gabriel told the priest Zechariah, “Because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time” (Luke 1:20). God’s promises will be fulfilled when the time comes; they are not contingent on any human conditions. No matter how zealous a person may be, the promise will not be fulfilled until that time comes; and no matter how much one may sleep, it will be fulfilled when the time comes. Therefore, all humans can do is hold God’s promise in their hearts and wait. Those who continue to wait for that promise of God are the true Israelites.

● Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher left behind the following words:

Be careful with your thoughts, for they will one day become words.

Be careful with your words, for they will one day become actions.

Be careful with your actions, for they will one day become habits.

Be careful with your habits, for they will one day become your character.

Be careful of your character, for it will one day become your destiny.

She is saying that what you believe in your heart is reflected in your words and actions, which become your character and ultimately shape even your destiny. If Christ always dwells in your heart, it will be reflected in your words and actions; eventually, this will become a habit, shape your character, and determine your destiny. This reminds me of the words of the Psalms: “Blessed is the one who delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers.” (Psalm 1:2–3) Let us firmly dwell with Christ in our hearts. I pray that Christ will govern our words and actions.