

Title: ID: Law or Promise?**[Slide 1]****Text: Galatians 3:15-29****IDs true and false****New ID: What's it worth to you?**

How much would you pay for a brand new ID? How bad would you want it?

Do you want a black market Swedish passport? It will cost you \$12,200. A black market Australian passport complete with visa will set you back \$15,000. A fake Chinese passport costs from \$10k to \$25k. Add an altered photo for another \$3500-\$5000. On the other hand, a fake Indian passport is a bargain at \$294.

If you are a foreigner who wants to work in the U.S.A., a fake green card will cost you between \$75 and \$300. But if you want a legit green card and have a whole lot of money, you can plunk down a \$500,000 or more investment in a Targeted Employment Area and have the real thing, thanks to the EB-5 program. Anyone who has visited Jay Peak recently has seen how popular that option is!

A new ID: What's it worth to you?

Of course there's another way to have full citizenship in the U.S.A. All you have to do is be born here, or have a parent who is a U.S. citizen. Citizenship, including access to a \$140 valid passport, is your *birthright*.

God's Promise:

Whenever people travel from one part of the world to another they face the problem of identity. Will they be forever outsiders, or will they be able to discover a new identity in their new home.

Abraham was one of those travelers who faced the immigrant's identity crisis. Already a senior citizen, God came to him with a strange command:

Genesis 12:1 NIV

The LORD had said to Abram [Abraham's former name], "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you."

Like millions of people today, Abraham left everything he knew behind -- country, ethnic group, extended family – to travel to a place he had never seen. But this journey came with the promise of a new identity, one like none other in the entire world:

Genesis 12:2-3 NIV

*"I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.*

*I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you."*

Here is a new and powerful identity for a complete stranger in a foreign land. He will be:

- A "great nation" blessed by God
- A "great name" and reputation
- A blessing to those around him
- A father to a restored humanity – all the nations

This promised new identity was nothing less than the promise that God would undo the effects of evil and death that had enslaved human beings. It would begin with a 90 year old woman and a 100 year old man having a baby boy – a miracle of God's creative power alone! Abraham's and Sarah's son Isaac would be the first member of that "great nation" that would one day become God's New Creation.

A Birthright ID:

Like Abraham and Sarah, you and I are travelers in search of our true God-given identity. The world around us offers any number of false or stolen

passports – at a price. And when we try to make those identities work for us, we end up pretending to be someone we aren't. Our true identity cannot be stolen or forged. It can't be pasted into someone else's passport. It is something that must be miraculously birthed by the power of the Creator Himself. It's a gift.

Law or Promise?

The Promise:

When Paul wrote his Letter to the Galatians, he was writing to people who were new to their spiritual journey of following Jesus and were becoming confused as to their new identity. False teachers had come offering fake spiritual passports for the journey. The price for these false documents: being compelled to adopt the customs and rules of Judaism. Only then, they were told, would they have right standing before God and become part of His family.

Paul challenges this false identity by reminding them of how the story began – with God's free gift of a new identity to Abraham:

Galatians 3:15-16 Kingdom New Testament

My brothers and sisters, let me use a human illustration. When someone makes a covenanted will, nobody sets it aside or adds to it.

Well, the promises were made 'to Abraham and his family.' It doesn't say 'his families', as though referring to several, but indicates one: 'and to your family' – which means the Messiah.

The New ID began with a promise – the promise that we saw God making to Abraham when He called him to that strange journey and said that he would become a great nation that would bless the whole world. This new ID would be for a redeemed and restored people – one new family.

The Law:

So what about Abraham's earthly family, the Jewish people? *Hadn't God given them a very specific identity, complete with rules regarding everything from circumcision to Sabbath?* Shouldn't the Galatian Christians be expected to conform to these rules and traditions if they wanted to join God's Family?

Paul answers by distinguishing between the Promise, which came first, and the Law, which came much later. Each had a part to play, but the Promise took precedence.

Galatians 3:17-18 Kingdom New Testament

This is what I mean. God made this covenanted will; the law, which came 430 years later, can't undermine it and make the promise null and void.

If the inheritance came through the law, it would no longer be by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise.

What is the key to our new ID: Law or Promise? For Paul there was no question. The Promise was the only source of our new identity. It was meant to be a *birthright* ID, not something earned or manufactured by human effort. Just as God had given Abraham and Sarah a baby when they could not conceive, He gives us new life – a whole new identity as part of His New Creation.

So why the Law?

So why so many rules? Why the law.

Well, think of what happens when you decide to buy a plane ticket for a commercial flight. When you print your boarding pass, you hold in your hand *the promise* that you have the new identity of *passenger* on that flight. You even have a seat number, and maybe some room in the overhead bin.

But before you get on the plane to take your seat, you must first deal with *the Law*. Nobody gets on the plane without going through security. You must present your passport or driver's license. Then you take off your belt, your shoes, your coat and all other metal objects. You put your stuff in a plastic tray. Your carry on and all the other stuff gets x-rayed, while you get scanned. And you don't want to mess up this part of the process! *Just do as you're told!*

Even at the gate, you are still not a passenger. You have to wait until it's your turn to board the plane. Only then does your identity change from would-be passenger to that of a person flying above the clouds to a new destination.

Paul points out that God gave His Law to prepare a people for the mission of launching His New Creation. And what's worse, to follow the airport analogy, they failed the test of getting through security! As Paul puts it:

Galatians 3:19a Kingdom New Testament

Why then the law? It was added because of the transgressions, until the family should come to whom it was promised.

Jesus ID

Finally, the Faithful Traveler:

It was only when Jesus Messiah came that the way was opened for us to "get through security" and onto the plane. Paul says:

Galatians 3:22 Kingdom New Testament

But the Bible [the Law] shut everything together under the power of sin, so that the promise – which comes by the faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah – should be given to those who believe.

When we put our trust in Jesus and His faithfulness to the point of dying for our sins, God allows *His identity to become our brand new identity*. Instead of trying to get through security with an inadequate or forged passport, God *issues a brand new one on the spot! We are welcomed into God's family on the basis of Jesus' ID.*

The Old Testament Law kept an eye on us until it was time for that *brand new identity* to be revealed:

Galatians 3:23-24 Kingdom New Testament

Before this faithfulness arrived, we were kept under guard by the law, in close confinement until the coming faithfulness should be revealed. Thus the law was like a babysitter for us, looking after us until the coming of the Messiah, so that we might be given covenant membership on the basis of faithfulness.

Jesus' ID:

Our brand new "Promise ID" is like no other identity in the world. Instead of having an identity that *distinguishes* us from others, we find that this

identity brings us back together – just as God had originally intended. Paul describes it this way:

Galatians 3:26 Kingdom New Testament

For you are all children of God through the faithfulness which is in Messiah, Jesus.

All other distinctions no longer matter:

Galatians 3:28 Kingdom New Testament

There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no 'male and female'; you are all one in the Messiah, Jesus.

Paul *is not saying* that you can't be of Jewish or Gentile heritage. He is not saying that the earthly distinction between slave and free, or male and female cease to exist. He *is saying* that they simply don't matter in God's family. We're all equally His children. When we take on Jesus the Messiah's ID, we become Abraham's family and inherited the promise.

ID in Christ:

Next time you look in the mirror, whom do you see? Do you see a person defined by the tribes, politics and economics around him or her? Or do you see a person who has been birthed into God's Family?

Next time you look at a total stranger, whom do you see? Do you see a person who is different from you in various ways? Do you see that person through the lens of us/them? Or do you see someone who was meant to be birthed, just like you, into God's Family?

It all depends on where your ID comes from. Law or Promise.