

“The Inheritance through Promise”
(Galatians 3:15-18)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. Last week, Paul introduced more arguments to show the Gentile believers in Galatia clearly that the Law was not the way to be reconciled to God: only faith in Christ was.
 - a. Again, we are not necessarily tempted by the Jews to become Jewish.
 - b. But each of us are tempted every day to rely on our works, instead of Christ alone.
 - c. There are even those in Reformed circles today promoting the idea that our works will in some way justify us: e.g., New Perspective on Paul, Federal Vision.
 - d. But we must be on guard against any view of works salvation.
2. Paul asked the Galatians these questions: Think of this as a Justification Catechism.
 - a. Do you know that Jesus was publicly crucified? Yes (3:1).
 - b. Do you think He died for nothing? God forbid. If salvation could have come through law, it would have been through the Law and Christ wouldn't have had to die (2:21).
 - c. Did you receive the saving and sanctifying influences of the Spirit through the preaching of the Law or the Gospel of grace? It was by hearing the true Gospel of salvation by grace through faith alone and not by our works (3:2).
 - d. Since you needed the Spirit's work to begin the work of salvation, do you think you can finish it yourself through the Law? No, we can do nothing apart from Christ, from His Spirit dwelling in us (v. 3).
 - e. When you embraced Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior and suffered persecution for it, was it all for nothing? It wasn't for nothing (v. 4). As a matter of fact, Jesus promises a reward for our suffering (Matt. 5:10-12).
 - f. Does God give His Spirit and work His miracles through the keeping of the Law or through believing the Gospel? He does so through the Gospel only; this was the message He confirmed with miracles (v. 5).
 - g. How was Abraham, the father of the Jews saved? Was he saved by works or through faith? It was by believing the promises of God (v. 6).
 - h. How did God tell Abraham that He would save the Gentiles? In the same way as Abraham (v. 8).
 - i. What did God say would be true of those who tried to justify themselves by keeping the Law? If they didn't keep it perfectly, they would fall under the curse and wrath of God for their sins (v. 10).
 - j. What did God tell the Old Covenant believers was the only way of salvation? The righteous shall live by faith (v. 11).
 - k. Is living by faith and living by the Law the same thing? No. The Law is not of faith: He who practices them shall live by them (v. 12).
 - l. What is the only way that we can be freed from the curse we are already under because of the Law? Christ is the only One who can take it away, who has taken it away, and it's only by believing on Him that we can be freed from it (vv. 13-14).

B. Preview.

1. Paul goes on this morning to explain why salvation is by grace through faith and not by the Law.
 - a. The Old Covenant Jews didn't understand everything God revealed them right away.
 - b. They also had sin to contend with that distorted their view.
 - c. Most seemed to think that when the Law was given by Moses, God was introducing a new way to be reconciled to Him:
 - (i) Not as Abraham was – through faith - but now through the works of the Law.
 - (ii) This certainly appears to be what the Pharisees believed: salvation through birth as sons of Abraham, circumcision and either having the Law or by doing some kind of lip service to it.
 - (iii) This also appears to be what the Judaizers believed, who were the “sons” of these Pharisees.
2. Over against this, Paul tells us two things:
 - a. First, the Law, which was given after the Abrahamic Covenant, did not abolish the Abrahamic Covenant or the way of salvation God gave through that covenant.
 - b. Second, why God gave them the Law in the first place: to point them to the salvation that was promised through the Seed of Abraham.
3. This morning, we're going to look at the first point and see three things.
 - a. First, that the covenants God gave are permanent.
 - b. Second, that the covenant God made with Abraham not only contained promises made to Abraham, but also to Christ.
 - c. Finally, the Law, which came later, did not abolish the promises God made to Abraham or to Jesus Christ, and therefore, did not change the way a person is saved.

II. Sermon.

- A. First, we'll want to consider that the covenants God gave are permanent. “Brethren, I speak in terms of human relations: even though it is *only* a man's covenant, yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it” (v. 15).
 1. First, let's remind ourselves what a covenant is:
 - a. A covenant is either an agreement between two parties, or it may be sovereignly imposed by one party on another.
 - (i) The covenant between Jacob and Laban was an agreement (Gen. 31).
 - (ii) The covenant between God and His people was sovereignly imposed.
 - b. Covenants contain certain stipulations: do this, don't do that.
 - (i) The covenant between Jacob and Laban was that they would not pass by the rock they had set up to do each other harm.
 - (ii) The requirement God imposed on His people was perfect obedience according to His standards: the Ten Commandments.
 - c. And covenants contain certain promises.
 - (i) If Jacob and Laban kept the covenant, there would be peace, if not, then war.
 - (ii) If God's people kept their covenant with God and obeyed, there would be blessing; if not, then punishment.

- d. A covenant established the basis and terms upon which two parties would relate to one another.
2. Once it was entered into, it was a legally binding contract.
 - a. Even a man's covenant – one made between men – could not be set aside or altered.
 - b. If that is true of a man's covenant, how much more of God's?
 - c. Matthew Henry writes, "When a deed is executed, or articles of agreement are sealed, both parties are bound, and it is too late then to settle things otherwise; and therefore it is not to be supposed that by the subsequent law the covenant of God should be vacated."
 - d. God is not a man that He should repent or change His mind (Num. 23:19).
- B. Second, Paul tells us something about this covenant that we don't often think about: the covenant God made with Abraham not only contained promises made to Abraham, but also to Christ. "Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as *referring* to many, but *rather* to one, 'And to your seed, that is, Christ' (v. 16).
1. What were the promises God made to Abraham?
 - a. Basically, God promised to give Abraham three things:
 - (i) The land of Canaan: "The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, 'Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever'" (Gen. 13:14-15; Cf. Gen. 12:).)
 - (ii) That He would multiply his descendants, when Abraham didn't have even one child: "I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth, so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered" (v. 16).
 - (iii) And He promised that through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed – that is, through his Seed: "And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed" (12:3); "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice" (22:18).
 - b. God fulfilled these promises to Abraham in a literal way.
 - (i) Abraham's descendants possessed the land of Canaan (Josh. 21:43-45).
 - (ii) The Lord did multiply his descendants as the dust of the earth, as the stars in the heavens (Deu. 1:10).
 - (iii) And through his seed all the nations of the earth have been and are being blessed – salvation is from the Jews (John 4:22).
 2. But God also made and fulfilled these promises to Christ.
 - a. "Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as *referring* to many, but *rather* to one, 'And to your seed, that is, Christ' (v. 16).
 - (i) These promises were not to be fulfilled only in a literal way to Abraham.
 - (ii) Neither would they be fulfilled through the Jewish nation.

- (iii) Paul says they were made to Abraham and to Jesus Christ.
- b. The “reality” behind these literal fulfillments was also promised, but they were promised to Christ.
 - (i) The promise to Him that He would possess the land was pointing to the fact that He would be the heir of the world.
 - (a) “I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the *very* ends of the earth as Your possession” (Psalm 2:7-8).
 - (b) “For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of *His* government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this” (Isa. 9:6-7).
 - (c) This includes the world now and that which is to come.
 - (ii) The promise to Him that He would have many descendants was pointing to the people the Father would give Him for His work of redemption: to those Christ would give birth to, as it were.
 - (a) “But the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting *Him* to grief; if He would render Himself *as* a guilt offering, He will see *His* offspring, He will prolong *His* days, and the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand” (Isa. 53:10).
 - (b) The author to the Hebrews writes, “For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one *Father*; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, ‘I will proclaim your name to My brethren, in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.’ And again, ‘I will put my trust in Him.’ And again, ‘Behold, I and the children whom God has given me” (2:11-13).
 - (iii) And the promise to Him that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through Him was pointing to the salvation He would bring to all men through His obedience and death.
 - (a) “Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself” (John 12:31-32).
 - (b) “The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, *saying*, ‘All the nations will be blessed in you” (Gal. 3:8).
 - (c) “And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of* the whole world” (1 John 2:2).
- c. Abraham saw these things, he believed, and it was credited to him as righteousness by God.

- (i) When he believed, he was justified/saved
 - (ii) When he believed the promises, which would be fulfilled in Christ, he also become an heir of the world to come in Christ, ““For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith” (Rom. 4:13).
- d. The point to the Galatians and to us is: If we would inherit these blessings, we must also embrace the promises in Jesus Christ: the promised Seed.
- (i). If we embrace the same promises in Christ, then we are the true children of Abraham, “Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham” (Gal. 3:7).
 - (ii) If we trust in Christ, then we receive the same blessings as Abraham, “So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer” v. 9).
 - (iii) The inheritance comes through the promises given to Christ, received by faith, and not through the works of the Law.
- C. And this brings us to the final point, the Law, which came later, did not abolish the promises God made to Abraham or to Jesus Christ or the way of salvation. “What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise” (vv. 17-18).
1. The Mosaic Covenant (the Law) was also a covenant.
 - a. It was a new arrangement made by God, besides the Abrahamic Covenant.
 - b. It included new laws, a new way of relating to God through sacrifices and ceremonies.
 2. But it did not abolish the Abrahamic Covenant.
 - a. Remember the principle we saw at the beginning: once ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it.
 - b. That means the promise is not nullified: righteousness/life still comes through faith in the promises of God.
 - c. If salvation were now based on law, it would no longer be by way of promise, but that is exactly how God gave it to Abraham.
 3. What was the purpose of the Mosaic Covenant then if not to provide a way of salvation? That’s what we’ll look at this evening.
 4. But for now let’s focus on the only way God has provided for us to find eternal life – through faith in Jesus Christ – as we prepare to come to the table of the Lord. Amen.