



World Christian Fellowship

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Galatians

Lesson 31- Eternal Promise of Salvation

Galatians 3:15-18, *Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though it is only a man's covenant, yet if it is confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it.* ¹⁶*Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ.* ¹⁷*And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect.* ¹⁸*For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise.*

In every generation we must fight for the true gospel, because the enemy of God Satan, will endeavour to clutter the true gospel with a false message. Inevitably, he wants to add works to the gospel of grace and faith.

Galatians 3:1, bewitched, deceived by the false gospel.

A gospel of faith plus works is a false gospel.

In chapter 1 of Galatians the apostle Paul wrote, “If anybody preaches a false gospel let him be damned, let him be anathema.” Repeats it twice.

True gospel that must be proclaimed by the true church.

In every generation we always earnestly contend for the gospel, because it is the truth alone that saves, and it is the truth that must be proclaimed by the church. If the church is confused about the gospel, then the church fails in its mission in the world. So, Paul expositis the reality of the gospel of salvation by faith in the book of Galatians.

Promise:

How many times in **Galatians 3:15-18**, the word “promise” appears?

Six times!

Promise is the word itself is filled with hopeful realities. We love it when someone makes a promise.

It is a kind of

- ✓ A pledge of love,
- ✓ a pledge of loyalty,
- ✓ a pledge of faithfulness, and
- ✓ a pledge of integrity.

It is a promise that good will come to us.

Sometimes the word “promise” is called a word of honour.

A synonym for “promise” would be

- “guarantee.”
- “vow.”
- “bond.” and
- “covenant.”

Wedding as an example:

When you go to a wedding, a man and a woman pledge their devotion to one another. They make vows that define a bond and a covenant. They are covenanting with one another to provide for the other love, loyalty, good will, kind intentions, blessings, and to be faithful and have integrity.

They are committing to fulfil their promises and that is a covenant.

God has made covenants.

What is the difference?

God’s covenants are unilateral whereas marriage and any other human covenants are not unilateral.

The covenants that God makes are from Him alone and they are “unconditional.” There are critical unconditional covenants in the Bible.

Those covenants can be defined by three things.

1. **Divine**
2. **Eternal**
3. **Gracious**

- They are divine since they come from God alone, and they are unconditional. They don't depend on anything anybody does.
- They are eternal, and irrevocable.
- They are gracious, and undeserved.

God's divine, eternal, gracious promises they don't depend on us for their fulfilment, they depend on God. Thus, they are covenants of promise or we can call that God's promises.

God speaks to Noah and his sons who have been brought through the flood in the ark.

Genesis 9:11, *Thus I establish My covenant with you: Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth."*

There is no condition there. This again is a divine, eternal and gracious.

Genesis 9:12-17, *And God said: "This is the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: ¹³I set My rainbow*

in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. ¹⁴ It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud; ¹⁵ and I will remember My covenant which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶ The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” ¹⁷ And God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh that is on the earth.”

For as long as the earth exists, there will never be another universal flood. The earth will ultimately be destroyed by fire, but not by flood. There you have God’s divine, eternal, and gracious covenant of promise.

Now that is a temporal covenant that relates just to the created order. But there are in the book of Genesis and in the Old Testament covenants that are spiritual covenants!

We will look in detail the following.

1. Abrahamic covenant
2. Davidic covenant
3. New Covenant

1. Abrahamic Covenant

God gave Abraham a covenant in Genesis 12.

Genesis 12:2-3, *I will make you a great nation;*

I will bless you

And make your name great;

And you shall be a blessing.

3 I will bless those who bless you,

And I will curse him who curses you;

And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

Through the loins of Abraham, God is going to bless the nations of the world. This is spiritual blessing.

Yes, there is a promise of land, but the point is a spiritual blessing to the world, to the nations through Abraham. That is a promise. There are no conditions there. There is nothing that was required of Abraham.

Genesis 17:19, *Then God said: “No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him.*

“Sarah your wife will bear you a son.” That is part of the fulfilment of the covenant. “If you’re going to have a whole generation of people, you are going to have people as abundant and present as the stars of the sky and the sand of the sea.”

God says, “you have to start with somebody. Your wife will bear a son, you will call his name Isaac. I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.”

So, the covenant with Abraham that came through Isaac was an everlasting covenant. It has the elements of everlasting on the spiritual level.

The covenant God made with Abraham, and His oath to Isaac, He confirmed to Jacob for a statute to Israel as an everlasting covenant.

1 Chronicles 16:16-17, *The covenant which He made with Abraham, And His oath to Isaac, ¹⁷ And confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, To Israel for an everlasting covenant,*

So, the covenant given to Abraham is an everlasting covenant, the end of which is to bring blessing through Israel to the nations of the earth, to all the nations of the earth.

Galatians 3:8, *And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, “In you all the nations shall be blessed.”*

So, the Abrahamic covenant is a spiritual covenant that has everlasting implications.

2. Davidic Covenant

God made a covenant with David that He would give him a greater son, and it would be the Messiah, and He would reign and He would fulfil all the promises of God.

2 Samuel 7:12-13, *“When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.*

This is the covenant made with David.

The prophets reiterated the promises of the Abrahamic covenant blessing to the world.

The prophets reiterated the Davidic covenant that there would come a Messiah who would be King, who would subdue evil, who would reign and ultimately reign forever.

So, the Davidic and the Abrahamic covenant were always in the minds of the Jewish people the things that they hoped for.

Isaiah 55:2-3, *Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance. ³ Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your*

soul shall live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you— The sure mercies of David.

The Davidic covenant is an everlasting covenant according to the faithful mercies shown to David.

The Davidic covenant promised the Messiah. It promised the Messiah will reign and rule, subduing of evil, and the establishment of righteousness. The people who are in that covenant will walk in God's ordinances, keep His statutes, and be at peace.

God says, "My dwelling place will be with them." So, this is a spiritual covenant.

- We have the Abrahamic covenant which promises blessing to the nations of the world.
- We have the Davidic covenant which promises salvation to the people of God, extending beyond Israel to the nations of the world.

Ezekiel 37:24-28, *"David My servant shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall also walk in My judgments and observe My statutes, and do them. ²⁵ Then they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, where your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell there, they, their children, and their children's children, forever; and My servant David shall be their prince forever. ²⁶ Moreover I will [c]make a*

covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore. ²⁷ My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ²⁸ The nations also will know that I, the Lord, sanctify Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forevermore.” ’ ”

- ✓ In Genesis that the covenant with Abraham was everlasting, and
- ✓ The covenant with David is an everlasting covenant.

3. New Covenant

Jeremiah 31:31-33, *“Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah— ³² not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, ^[b] though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. ³³ But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.*

The character of this covenant:

“It’s not like the covenant I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt.” That was the Mosaic covenant, the law given on Sinai.

This isn’t like that!

Jeremiah 32:38-41, *They shall be My people, and I will be their God; ³⁹then I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them and their children after them. ⁴⁰And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me. ⁴¹Yes, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will assuredly plant them in this land, with all My heart and with all My soul.’*

- ✓ Abrahamic covenant, God says, “I will, I will, I will, I will.”
- ✓ Davidic covenant, God says, “I will, I will, I will, I will.”
- ✓ New covenant, God says, “I will, I will, I will, I will.”

The covenant is from God,

- ✓ Unilateral
- ✓ Eternal, and
- ✓ Everlasting.

None of them can be revoked because they are everlasting. They are dependent on God’s grace, not on anything that we have done to deserve the promises of these covenants.

Summary:

Three great promises by God.

The promise through Abraham to bless the world, a salvation blessing.

The promise to David to bless the world by bringing the Messiah, who establishes His kingdom.

The promise to the prophets of the new covenant, not external kingdom, but new hearts and a new relationship to God, to know God, to walk with God, to obey God, because we have a new heart and a new spirit, and we have been transformed.

These three everlasting covenants basically are the flow of salvation in redemptive history. The new covenant is the covenant that is necessary to make the promises of the Abrahamic and the Davidic come to pass.

God cannot bless the whole world,
God cannot bring the Messiah and establish His kingdom over people,
unless they have been changed, regenerated, and saved.

So, the new covenant is the covenant of salvation by which God redeems the people who then become the recipients of all the promises of the Abrahamic and the Davidic covenant.

The new covenant was ratified by Jesus in His death and resurrection. Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant.

Hebrews 12:24, *to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.*

His blood shedding is effective, validates, and ratifies the promises of the new covenant.

Hebrews 13:20, *Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,*

- ❖ The Abrahamic covenant is eternal.
- ❖ The Davidic covenant is eternal.
- ❖ The New covenant is eternal.

The tabernacle, the priesthood, the animal sacrifices they were part of the Mosaic law.

The covenant of Moses was divine, but it was not unconditional, it was not eternal, and it was not gracious.

Hence the covenant of Moses must be left behind, because we leave what essentially is not a lasting city to seek the city which is to come. The writers of Hebrews identify it as the New Jerusalem and heaven.

If you want to come to heaven, come out of from under the law of Moses. Come out from under the priesthood and the

sacrifices. Come out to Jesus! Come to the temple which is in heaven.

The Mosaic covenant was a covenant of law:

“Do this, do this, do this, do this, do this.

If you don’t, you’ll die. If you do, you’ll inherit the land.”

It was connected to the land and earthly blessing. Obviously, the people couldn’t keep it, and so they forfeited the land and the blessing that came with the land.

The covenant of Moses was not unilateral, but bilateral!

- Not unconditional, but conditional!
- Not eternal, but temporary.
- Not gracious, but graceless.

Galatians 3:10, *“Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them.”*

The covenant with Moses on Mount Sinai demanded perfect obedience and because no one could render that kind of obedience, everyone is cursed.

The law of Moses has no promises.

It is not a covenant of promise, it is a covenant of threat.

The Abrahamic covenant and the Davidic covenant are covenants of promise, and the new covenant is the ultimate covenant of promise!

New covenant is what qualifies us to be inheritors of the Abrahamic and the Davidic promises. The Abrahamic promise is salvation for all the nations, and the Davidic promise is to be a part of the glorious and everlasting kingdom of the son of David, the Messiah. The new covenant was ratified by Christ, and it was by faith.

The Abrahamic covenant and the new covenant are fulfilled, of course, in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Galatians 3:6, *“Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.”*

Galatians 3:7, *“Be sure that it is those who are of faith who are the sons of Abraham.”*

That’s how the Abrahamic covenant is permanent.

If you believe in Jesus Christ, you are a son of Abraham and an inheritor of the Abrahamic covenant. You have been blessed through the loins of Abraham. The Messiah’s introduced in the New Testament as son of Abraham, son of David. If you have believed the gospel, you are of the faith of Abraham, and therefore you are a spiritual child of Abraham.

Galatians 3:9, *“Those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.”*

Paul goes to immense lengths in his argument to make sure that no one ever mixes the law with faith, that no one ever inserts works with faith.

Contrast.

Apostle Paul shows that God’s dealings with Abraham, subsequently with David and the new covenant, and God’s dealing with Moses were on two different levels.

- ❖ To Abraham, God gave a promise.
- ❖ To Moses, God gave threats.

- ✓ The promise to Abraham, God says, “I will, I will, I will, I will,”
- ✓ The Davidic covenant, “I will, I will, I will,” and
- ✓ The New covenant, “I will, I will, I will, I will.”

But in the covenant with Moses, the law, God said, “You will, you will, you will, or else.”

The promise set forth a religion dependent on God!

- God’s plan,
- God’s grace,
- God’s initiation.

The law sets forth a religion dependent on man!

- Man's duty,
 - Man's obedience,
 - Man's works, and
 - Man's responsibility.
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- ✓ The promise is grounded in the grace of God and requires only faith.
 - ✓ The law is grounded in the works of men and requires perfect obedience. Disobedience brings curse and condemnation.

With this background in our mind let us look at verses 15 to 18.

The superiority of the promise of faith!

Paul gives us three reasons.

1. Confirmed
2. Christ centred
3. Sequence/orderly

1. Confirmed

V15, *Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though it is only a man's covenant, yet if it is confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it.*

The argument is that the Judaizers

They were saying that salvation was by faith alone in Abraham's day, subsequent years it was by faith alone. But when the law came, God changed the means of salvation.

- It was faith until the law,
- but when the law came, the way of faith was revoked.

The salvation was by faith and by keeping the law?

Paul answer: NO!

The covenant does NOT work that way.

The original Abrahamic promise of faith was confirmed and binding and can't be changed.

People don't even do that with a human covenant when it's been ratified. Once it's sealed and settled, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it.

The Greek word for covenant is, '*diathkē*' meaning, a binding promise, or a binding agreement.

Paul saying that

- when you make a binding agreement with someone,
- when you pledge yourself to something,
- when you warranty,
- When you guarantee,
- When you vow,

- When you bond yourself to something,

Once it's ratified no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it. God made a covenant, and it cannot be changed. The law of Moses doesn't change the promise made by God to Abraham.

Genesis 15:6, *“Abraham believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.”*

Righteousness imputed to a man who believed, not his own righteousness, because his righteousness is filthy rags. God grants him his own righteousness purely based on his faith. That's salvation by faith. Now that's the promise and that's the covenant of promise.

Abram said, “How do I know You're going to keep this? How do I know You're going to give me what You promised? How do I know that?”

Genesis 15:8, *“Lord God, how do I know that I'll possess these things?”*

Genesis 15:9-10, *So He said to him, “Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.”¹⁰ Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two.*

Why did he cut them in two?

That is how you cut a covenant in the ancient times.

When you made a pledge or a covenant with somebody, you sealed it in blood. You took animals that had value, you cut them in half. You put half the animal on one side, half the animal on the other side. Whoever was making the covenant passed through the bloody pieces, and that was an open ratification. That was an open affirmation that the covenant had been fixed by put one dead bird on one side, one dead bird on the other side.

This is a swearing by blood is the idea. The death of these animals is the indication of the seriousness of this commitment. It's going through this very dramatic blood ceremony. So, they were all cut in half, laid out and Abraham had to chase away the birds of prey that were coming down on the carcasses.

Genesis 15:12, *"When the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram."*

God anesthetized Abram and put him to sleep, because this was not going to be a covenant through which Abraham would pass. This wasn't a covenant between God and Abraham, this is a covenant between God and God.

It is unilateral, divine, and it is irrevocable. Therefore, dependent on Him, gracious, and not dependent on Abram.

God puts him to sleep with a divine aesthetic, he goes out, and God Himself alone passes through those pieces.

Galatians 15:17-18, *“It came about when the sun had set, very dark; there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces.”*

God bound Himself to that covenant, and unilaterally that covenant was ratified. Nobody tampers with a ratified covenant. It went into effect immediately, because Abraham there in that very chapter was justified by faith. Righteousness was imputed to him because he believed.

Salvation for Abraham was by faith, and God immediately ratified the covenant.

Romans 4:16, *Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all*

Legalists came to the churches in Galatia and said, we want to add to law it and going to change the conditions.

Paul’s argument is, “Even on a human level, you don’t do that.” Arguing from the lesser to the greater!

“If that isn’t even allowed on a human level with a human covenant, why would you think you could get away with it with a divine covenant?”

Men don’t allow their covenants to be changed; much more, God will not allow a covenant to be changed which He has confirmed.

No one can add conditions to that covenant, works to that covenant of justification by faith, which is a promise.

2. Christ Centred

V 16,¹⁶ *Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as of many, but as of one, “And to your Seed,” who is Christ.*

When God gave His promise to Abraham, He said, *“In you shall all the families of the earth be blessed, through you and your seed.”*

You say, “Well, didn’t He have his descendants in mind?”
Yes, He did.

In fact, you could sometimes see the word “seed” as a plural. We could say collectively, “We are all the seed of Abraham by faith,” as well as saying, “Christ as one is the seed of Abraham.”

Why does Paul narrow this down to Christ?

God said, "I will bless you and your seed,"

Why are we to understand that as Christ?

How are we to understand that as Christ?

The word "seed" can refer to one individual!

Genesis 4:25, referring to Seth and Seth alone.

Genesis 21:13, referring to Ishmael and Ishmael alone.

1 Samuel 1:11, it refers to Samuel.

2 Samuel 7:12, it refers to Solomon.

So, seed can refer to one. But it also can be a collective where it refers to many who could be defined as descendants.

Why does Paul narrow this down to Christ?

Because only in Christ are men blessed.

Men are blessed only when they are in union with Christ.

The promises come through the one who is Christ. That's why Paul loves to talk about being in Christ, dying in Christ, buried in Christ, rising in Christ. *"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless, I live yet not I, but Christ lives in me."*

The Abrahamic covenant and its promises, the Davidic covenant and its promises, the new covenant and its promises and realities are fulfilled only in Christ!

Christ who paid the penalty for our sins on the cross, so that by both His active obedience, active righteousness and His passive obedience, passive righteousness on the cross, He became the one who satisfied God. We died in Him, and we also received His righteous life imputed to us. It's all in Him.

God promised Abraham that God was going to bless the nations through his seed. He well may have thought of that seed being one person, and not Isaac because in Genesis 3:15, the promise had been given. Surely Abraham knew that promise, that the seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head.

Who is this seed?

Genesis 3:15, in **Genesis 12**, and the one in **Galatians** are one and the same and it is the Lord Jesus Christ.

The seed is ultimately Christ, and we receive all the blessings of all the covenants because we are in Christ.

- ✓ God's promise to Abraham is fulfilled in Christ.
- ✓ God's promise to David is fulfilled in Christ.
- ✓ The New covenant is fulfilled in Christ.

This covenant is divine, eternal and gracious.

It is from God! It was ratified in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Confirmed by God and centred in Christ. Nothing can interrupt it.

3. Sequence

V 17, And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect.

This is chronology.

You have got to study the Bible in the sense that you understand the progress of doctrine, the chronology. You must understand that chronology is fundamental to Bible interpretation critical.

So, four hundred and thirty years later.

Actually, from Abraham, it would have been over six hundred years.

Why does he say four hundred and thirty?

Because Paul's quoting from **Exodus 12:40**, which says four hundred and thirty years after the covenant was given the law came.

Why four hundred and thirty years?

Because it was four hundred and thirty years after the reiteration of the Abrahamic promise to Jacob, who then descended into Egypt.

So, the timing's exactly right.

Exodus 12:40, *Now the sojourn of the children of Israel who lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years.*

It was four hundred and thirty years after the final declaration of the Abrahamic covenant to Jacob.

Something that comes four hundred and thirty years later does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God so as to nullify the promise.

The Abrahamic covenant fulfilled in Christ.

The Davidic covenant fulfilled in Christ.

The new covenant fulfilled in Christ.

You can't bring the law into that to change and alter and interrupt.

Conclusion:

V 18, *For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise.*

All that was promised to Abraham, David, all that the prophets reiterate in the new covenant is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise.

Both the law and promise, the two are incompatible.

If God says the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise.

If it's Moses, then it's not the promise.

It's a grace gift.

You can't tamper with salvation by faith alone, and you can't let the law nullify the promises,

Every sinner who trusts in Christ crucified for salvation are blessed with,

- ✓ All the blessings promised to and through Abraham,
- ✓ All the blessings promised to and through David,
- ✓ All the blessings promised to and through the new covenant,
- ✓ All the blessings that come from God.

To require circumcision, require law, is to go backwards in history and nullify the plan of God.

- **The law says, "Do this, and live. Do this, and live."**
- **The gospel says, "Receive this, and live. It's a gift."**