

God's Eternal Covenant of Promise

Scripture: Galatians 3:15–18

Code: 48-16

We are again in the book of Galatians, so turn to Galatians chapter 3. And there's a reason for that. Since this is 2017, the five hundredth year of the celebration and the anniversary of the Reformation, seemed to me a good time to go through the book of Galatians. It was, in studying the book of Galatians, that Martin Luther was converted to Christ, it was studying the book of Galatians along with Romans that he understood the just shall live by faith, and salvation was by faith alone in Christ alone through grace alone. And that launched the Reformation, because the Roman Catholic Church had said, and still says, that salvation is a combination of faith and works. That is basically the view of the Roman Catholic Church and all forms of false religion. They combine faith in a deity as well as certain righteous and religious behaviors; and the combination of faith and works is what saves. This is so ubiquitous. This is so common.

I told you a few weeks ago, a recent survey of Protestant Evangelicals in America the question was asked, "Is salvation a matter of faith and works?" Fifty-two percent of Protestant Evangelicals said, "Yes, salvation is a matter of faith and works. It requires faith and works to be saved." That is to say that fifty-two percent of the surveyed Protestant Evangelicals have believed a false gospel. Salvation is by faith alone, and that is what launched the Reformation, and that is the true gospel that was also known to true believers before the Reformation all the way back to the apostles in the New Testament.

In every generation, however, before and since the Reformation, we have to fight for that true gospel, because the enemy of God and the enemy of men's souls, Satan, will endeavor to clutter the true gospel with a false message. And inevitably, he wants to add works to the gospel of grace and faith. And so in every generation we're always trying to protect people from being, in the language of Galatians 3:1, bewitched, deceived by the false gospel.

A gospel of faith plus works is a false gospel. And in chapter 1 of Galatians the apostle Paul wrote, "If anybody preaches a false gospel let him be damned, let him be *anathema*, let him be cursed." And he repeats it two times.

False gospels are damned because false gospels are damning gospels. And any gospel that says salvation is by faith and works, God does something and you do something, is a false gospel. This is so critical. This is the true gospel that saves, and any other gospel does not. And this is the true gospel that must be proclaimed by the true church.

It is possible for the true church to be confused about this. Even people who believe the true gospel can decide to open up the gate a little bit wider and embrace a false gospel. And that's what happened in Galatia, and that's why Paul says even the believers had become bewitched, and they had been demonstrating the foolishness of such bewitching.

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, as he does in Romans and elsewhere. But we're looking in particular at Galatians because of its primary role in the Reformation.

Now let's look at chapter 3 and verse 15. I want to read verses 15 through 18, just a brief passage this morning. "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. 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. 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."

You will notice how many times in the reading of that text you heard the word "promise." You will also notice that in the verse before that you see the word "promise." You will also notice at the end of the chapter in verse 29, that if you belong to Christ you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise. "Promise" appears six times in the text, and it is a very, very key word. I want to talk to you today about the contrast between the covenant of promise and the covenant of the law.

Now we all like the word "promise." The very word itself is filled with hopeful realities. We love it when someone makes a promise. It has the intention of good will built into it. It is a kind of pledge of love, a pledge of loyalty, a pledge of faithfulness, a pledge of integrity. It is a promise that good will come to us.

Sometimes the word "promise" is called a word of honor. A synonym for "promise" would be "guarantee." Another synonym would be "vow." Another synonym would be "bond." And critically, yet another synonym is "covenant."

For example, when you go to a wedding, and a man and a woman stand there and pledge their devotion to one another, they make vows. They make vows that define a bond and a covenant. They are convenanting with one another to provide for the other love, loyalty, good will, kind intentions, blessings, and to be faithful and have integrity. That is to say, they are committing to fulfill their promises; that is a covenant.

Now in the Bible, God has made covenants. God's covenants, unlike a marriage covenant, are unilateral; that is, the covenants that God makes are from Him alone. And we sometimes call them "unconditional." There are critical unconditional covenants in the Bible. Those covenants can be defined by three things. Number one, they are divine. That is to say, they come from God alone, and that's why they're unconditional. They don't depend on anything anybody does. They are divine and unconditional.

Secondly, they are eternal, and therefore, irrevocable. They are eternal, and therefore, irrevocable. And thirdly, they are gracious, and therefore, undeserved. So you have God making promises, covenants of promise that are unconditional, irrevocable, and undeserved. They are divine, eternal,

gracious promises. They don't depend on us for their fulfillment, they depend on God; and thus, they are covenants of promise. God makes promises.

Now if you look at Scripture you will see a number of times in the Old Testament where God establishes such a covenant of promise. In fact, the first one – and I think you should turn back to the book of Genesis, because we're going to see a few things there. But the first such covenant appears in the ninth chapter of Genesis just after the flood. And in the ninth chapter of Genesis in verse 11, God speaks to Noah and his sons who have been brought through the flood in the ark.

He says, "I establish My covenant with you," – My promise – "and all flesh shall never again be cut off by the water of the flood." There are no condition there. This again is a divine covenant. It is a permanent covenant. It is a gracious one. "Neither shall there be any food again to destroy the earth."

God said, "This is the sign of the covenant which I am making between Me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for all successive generations: I set My bow" – that's a rainbow – "in the cloud, and it shall be for a sign of a covenant between Me and the earth. It shall come about, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow will be seen in the cloud; and I will remember My covenant which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And never again shall the water become a flood to destroy all flesh." So you can stop worrying about the melting of the polar ice caps.

Verse 16: "When the bow is in the cloud, then I will look upon it to remember" – listen – "the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of 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, and those are the ones that we want to look at today.

In the seventeenth chapter of Genesis, God has already given Abraham a covenant. That's in chapter 12. We are familiar with the Abrahamic covenant: "I'll make you a great nation. I will bless you, make your name great. You'll be a blessing. Bless those who bless you; and the ones who curse you, I will curse. And in you, all the families of the earth will 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.

Now in chapter 17, we learn this: the covenant with Abraham, the promise to Abraham is repeated to Abraham and to the patriarchs through the book of Genesis. But there's one note that I want you to see in chapter 17, verse 19. God said, "Sarah your wife will bear you a son." And that's part of the fulfillment of the covenant. "If you're going to have a whole generation of people, you're going to have people as ubiquitous and present as the stars of the sky and the sand of the sea."

As God says, “you have to start with somebody. Your wife will bear a son; you’ll 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. That is to say, that it has elements that are everlasting on the spiritual level – an everlasting covenant.

That covenant is further defined in the text that I read to you earlier back in 1 Chronicles 16; and I read that because I wanted to refer to it. There is in that psalm of praise given to God the statement made in verse 16, that the covenant God made with Abraham, and His oath to Isaac, He confirmed to Jacob for a statute to Israel as 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. We saw that mentioned in chapter 3 of Galatians, verse 8, where it says, “All the nations will be blessed in You.” So the Abrahamic covenant is a spiritual covenant that has everlasting implications.

Now if you will look for a moment at Isaiah 55, I will show you the second covenant that is an everlasting covenant that has spiritual implications. This is the covenant made with David. Now it was made in 2 Samuel chapter 7. 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 fulfill all the promises of God. 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 take over the earth, 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.

Now we learn in Isaiah 55 something about the Davidic covenant. We learn in verse 3 that it is an everlasting covenant according to the faithful mercies shown to David. So we find in Genesis that the covenant with Abraham was everlasting, and the covenant with David is an everlasting covenant.

Now there is one more everlasting covenant that is absolutely critical. It is the covenant that we are most familiar with. Before I give that to you, let me just read some verses out of Ezekiel 37 to kind of reinforce the Davidic covenant. Verse 24 to the end of the chapter, Ezekiel 37.

“My servant David,” here’s the promise again of the Davidic covenant. “My servant David,” only now it moves to, “My servant, the Messiah, who is in the line of David, He will be King over them,” have one shepherd. “They’ll walk in My ordinances, keep My statutes, and observe them. They will live on the land I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived. They will live on it, they and their sons, and their sons’ sons, forever. And David My servant will be their prince forever.” That is the Messiah who is son of David. “I will make a covenant of peace with them; it’ll be an everlasting covenant with them.”

So the Davidic covenant promised the Messiah; it promised a reign and rule. It promised the subduing of evil, and the establishment of righteousness. It also promises, as we saw here, that the people who are in that covenant will walk in God’s ordinances, and keep His statutes and observe them, and be at peace. This is the everlasting covenant. And God says, “My dwelling place will be with them.” So this is a spiritual covenant. So you have the Abrahamic covenant which promises

blessing to the nations of the world, and you have the Davidic covenant which again promises salvation to the people of God, extending beyond Israel to the nations of the world.

There is one other critical covenant that is required for any of these to come to pass, and it is in Jeremiah 31. It is the third everlasting covenant that I want you to look at. And you know it as the new covenant. Jeremiah 31:31, “The days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.” And we’re talking about these because they are formal covenants: the Abrahamic covenant, the Davidic covenant, and now the new covenant.

Here’s 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’s the Mosaic covenant, the law given on Sinai. This isn’t like that. “That covenant they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the Lord. “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the Lord, “I will put My law within them; on their heart I will write it. I will be their God, and they will be My people. They will all know Me. I will forgive their iniquity and their sin; I will remember no more.” That is the new covenant. That is the new covenant.

Now, the Abrahamic covenant and the new covenant are fulfilled, of course, in the Lord Jesus Christ – and we’ll see that in a moment. But in Jeremiah 32 it’s important to note that this covenant, this new covenant, is also an everlasting covenant. Verse 38: “They will be My people,” – he picks it up where he left off in 37 – “I will be their God. I’ll give them one heart, one way; they may fear Me always, for their own good and for the good of their children after them. I will make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; and I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so they will not turn away from Me. I will rejoice over them to do good and will faithfully plant them in the land with all My heart and with all My soul.”

In the Abrahamic covenant, God says, “I will, I will, I will, I will.” In the Davidic covenant, “I will, I will, I will, I will.” In the new covenant, “I will, I will, I will, I will.” Again, divine is the covenant. The covenant is from God unilaterally. The covenant is also eternal. Every one of those three is identified as an everlasting covenant, and none of them can be revoked because they are everlasting. And they are dependent on God’s grace, not on anything that we have done to deserve the promises of these covenants.

So you have these 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; and then the promise to the prophets of the new covenant, in which we’re not talking about some kind of 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’ve 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, and He cannot bring the Messiah and establish His kingdom over people unless they have been changed, unless they have been regenerated, and unless they have been saved. And 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.

Now let's look at the book of Hebrews for a moment, because this will kind of help us to pull this all together. The new covenant was ratified by Jesus in His death and resurrection. Hebrews chapter 12, verse 24, "Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel." Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant. His blood shedding is efficacious. It validates, ratifies the promises of the new covenant.

Go over to chapter 13, verse 20. There's a benediction there. "Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord."

So the Abrahamic covenant is eternal; the Davidic covenant is eternal; the new covenant is eternal. These are the permanent covenants. And because of that, the writer of Hebrews – if you go back to chapter 13, verse 10 – the writer of Hebrews calls out to the Jewish readers, "We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat."

He's saying to the Jews, "You don't want to hold on to the priesthood. You don't want to hold on to the tabernacle, to the temple. We have a different altar. For the bodies of those animals" – in verse 11 – "whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest as an offering for sin, are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate. So, let us go to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come." He says, "Don't remain with the priests and the temple and the sacrifice; that's not a lasting city. Come out of that and come to Jesus."

The tabernacle, the priesthood, the animal sacrifices – they were part of the Mosaic law. And the covenant of Moses was divine; but it was not unconditional, it was conditional. It was not eternal, and it was not gracious. So it has to 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 identifies it as the New Jerusalem and heaven.

So 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; leave that behind. Come to the temple which is in heaven. All of that has to be left behind.

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. Even to this day today, they do not have the land, and never have since their captivity that God originally promised them back in Genesis.

So the sum of all this is to understand this important reality. The covenant of Moses was not unilateral, but bilateral; not unconditional, but conditional; not eternal, but temporary; and not gracious, but graceless.

In fact, go back now to Galatians. Verse 10 of chapter 3 says, "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, because the new covenant is what qualifies us to be inheritors of the Abrahamic and the Davidic promises. And 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. And that's what Paul has been saying, hasn't he?

Going back to the beginning of this chapter. For example, if you go back to verse 6: "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." Verse 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 today, 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. Look at verse 9: "Those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer."

So, the contrast has to be made. Now let me just say, this is really important for us. 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. And yet, that is exactly what all forms of false religion do, because that's a satanic heresy. Anybody who comes with another gospel is damned.

So the contrast. The apostle shows that God's dealings with Abraham, and subsequently with David and the new covenant, and God's dealing with Moses were on two different levels. To Abraham, He gave a promise. To Moses, He gave threats: "Do this, or else."

In the promise to Abraham, God says, "I will, I will, I will, I will," and reiterated it to the Davidic covenant, which is inside the Abrahamic covenant, "I will, I will, I will," and then reiterated it in 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, man's responsibility. 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. And nobody can render that, so the law of Moses just condemns.

Now with that in mind as background, let's look at the text, verses 15 and following, as Paul helps us to understand how important. This is so important that he is carefully putting his argument together – typically Pauline, and very convincing.

The superiority of the promise of faith, that's verses 15 to 18. Then next week we'll look at 19 to 22, the inferiority of the law. This is the superiority of the promise of faith, verses 15 to 18, and Paul gives

us four reasons for the superiority of the promise.

He is arguing against. Now remember, he had gone to Galatia and founded churches, preached the gospel of grace and faith alone without works. He had preached that gospel; people believed, churches were planted in the various cities in the region of Galatia. Then some Jews from Jerusalem came following on the heels of Paul and came to those churches, and said, "Wait a minute; grace is not enough, faith is not enough. You have to add works, you have to be circumcised, and you have to adhere to the laws of Moses. Salvation is a combination and grace and work, faith and works."

Paul writes this letter to attack that. Now the first argument he makes is the superiority of the promise because of its confirmation. That's point one, it's conformation.

Look at verse 15: "Brethren, brethren." He's talking to believers here, believers who have been bewitched; not that they didn't believe the true gospel, they did and were saved by it. But they had begun to listen to the Judaizers and were maybe opening the door to accept a false gospel.

"Brethren, I speak in terms of human relations. I'm going to give you a human illustration." Okay, Paul does what the rabbis love to do, and he does it a lot; he argues from the lesser to the greater.

"So let's start on a human level," as Jesus often does in His parables. "Let's back down to a human level to begin this discussion. I speak in terms of human relations: even though it is only a man's covenant," – it's only a covenant between men, or it's a covenant that a man makes, or a promise that a man makes – "yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it."

Now the argument is this: the Judaizers are saying that it's okay. So salvation was by faith alone in Abraham's day, and 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, and salvation was by faith – yes, you had to believe in God – and by keeping the law. "No," says Paul, "no, because that's not how covenants work."

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

A covenant is by definition, *diathk* in the Greek, a binding promise, or a binding agreement. And that's what he's talking about here. He's talking about a human covenant. When you make a binding agreement with someone, when you pledge yourself to something, when you warranty and guarantee and vow and 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 it.

Let's go back to Genesis 15 quickly. I want to show you how God basically tied Himself to that covenant. This is very, very fascinating. God had given the covenant promise to Abraham, and salvation was by faith. 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. But God grants him his own righteousness purely on the basis of his faith. That's salvation by faith. Now that's the promise; that's the covenant of promise.

So here, 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?” Down in verse 8: “Lord God, how do I know that I’ll possess these things?”

So, God says, “Here’s what you do. Bring Me a three year old heifer, three year old female goat, three year old ram, turtle dove, and a pigeon,” three animals and two birds. He brought these to Him, cut them in two. Why did he cut them in two? Because that’s how you cut a covenant.

In 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; and 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: put one dead bird on one side, one dead bird on the other side.

So there is a – swearing by blood is the idea. The death of these animals is the indication of the seriousness of this commitment. It’s not just signing on a bottom line, 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.

Then verse 12 says, “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. Again, it is unilateral, it is divine, and it is therefore irrevocable, and it is therefore dependent on Him, gracious, and not dependent on Abram. God puts him to sleep with a divine anesthetic, he goes out, and God Himself alone passes through those pieces.

Go over to verse 17. “It came about when the sun had set, very dark; there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces.” That’s God appearing as light and smoke. “On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abraham. ‘To your descendants I will give the land.’” And it goes on with the elements of the Abrahamic covenant.

So God bound Himself to that covenant; and once God was bound to that covenant, unilaterally that covenant was ratified. Nobody tampers with a ratified covenant. It went into affect immediately, 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 says, “Whoever believes is a son of Abraham.”

Legalists came along and said, “No, we’re going to add to it. We’re going to change the conditions. We’re going to throw the law in this thing.” And 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. And no one can add conditions to that covenant, works to that covenant of justification by faith, which is a promise.”

So, first of all, you can’t do anything to alter the covenant of faith, salvation by faith, which God gave

to Abraham, through which He blesses the nations of the world who are by faith saved, and become spiritual sons of Abraham. You can't change it, because God Himself confirmed it. So it is confirmed.

Secondly, another reason to accept the superiority of this covenant of faith is its Christ-centeredness – very important. Verse 16: "Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed." Yeah, that's repeated starting in chapter 12, "To you and your seed, to your seed." He does not say "to seeds" as referring to many, but rather to one. "And to your seed," that is Christ. This is most remarkable, most remarkable.

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."

So why does Paul narrow this down to Christ? Why are we to say when He said, "I will bless you and your seed," why are we to understand that as Christ? How are we to understand that as Christ? But that is exactly what verse 16 is saying. This is brilliant; this is powerful. He moves from the human illustration in verse 15 to God's covenant in verse 16. And what he saying is pretty simple.

The word "seed" can refer to one individual; it does in Genesis 4:25, referring to Seth and Seth alone. It does in Genesis 21:13 referring to Ishmael and Ishmael alone. It does in 1 Samuel 1:11, it refers to Samuel. Second 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? And the answer is this: because only in Christ are men blessed. It is only in union with Him that you are blessed. 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."

Paul doesn't know where he ends and Christ begins. Over and over, "In Christ, in Christ, in Christ." Paul knows that all those throughout history who will be receiving the blessing to Abraham – and we can incorporate all the promises to David, all the promises of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenant – Paul knows that all of them will only receive those blessings because they are in Christ. Even the Old Testament people who died in faith before Christ came were in Him in His death. He died in their place, paying an atonement for their sins: the people who believed before Him, the people who believed after Him.

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, in Christ – listen – who perfectly kept to the law, in 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.

Now Abraham heard this, 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. And, surely, Abraham knew that promise, that the seed of the woman would crush

the serpent's head.

Who is this seed? Who is this seed? It was one in Genesis 3:15. It was one in Genesis 12. It is one in Galatians. 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 in its richest, fullest meaning is fulfilled in Christ. God's promise to David in its fulfillment is fulfilled in Christ. The new covenant is fulfilled in Christ, in His death, in His resurrection in which we are united with Him. It is settled then. This covenant is divine. This covenant is eternal. This covenant is gracious. It is from God; it was ratified in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Confirmed by God, and centered in Christ. Nothing can interrupt it.

Thirdly, its chronology. Just quickly, verse 17: "What I am saying is this: the law," – the Mosaic law – "which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise." This is chronology, the third point. Confirmation, Christ-centeredness, chronology.

You've 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; it's critical. The rabbis didn't do this; still don't. But a faithful student of Scripture understands chronology.

So, four hundred and thirty years later. Well, actually from Abraham, it would have been over six hundred years. Why does he say four hundred and thirty? Because he's quoting from Exodus 12:40, which says four hundred and thirty years after the covenant was given the law came.

And 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. Four hundred and thirty years is exactly what Exodus 12:40 says; and it was four hundred and thirty years after the final declaration of the Abrahamic covenant to Jacob.

Point is this: something that comes four hundred and thirty years later does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God so as to nullify the promise. You can't now all of a sudden inject law into this. You can't inject works into this. You are interrupting the flow of redemption.

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. You can't study the Bible in bits and pieces – listen – you have to study it as progressive revelation. Chronology matters in Scripture, as all faithful interpreters know.

And I know you understand that. You delight, I'm sure, in coming to the point where you not only understand what this verse and that verse and the other verse means, but where you see the flow of the progress of revelation. It's called biblical theology as it unfolds. The law then all of a sudden can't come and interrupt what God previously ratified four hundred and thirty years later. It would nullify all that's in Abraham, all that's in David, and all that's in the new covenant.

And there's a final note: the promise is superior because of its confirmation, its Christ-centeredness, its chronology, and finally, it's completeness. Verse 18, just quickly: "If the inheritance" – that's

salvation – “if the inheritance” – all that was promised to Abraham, all that was promised to David, all that the prophets reiterate in the new covenant – “if the full inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a 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. “But God has granted it, granted it.” Key word, *kecharistai*, from two Greek words: *charis*, meaning “grace,” *charis*, meaning “grace.” And in the perfect tense, “has been grace-given.” “But God has grace-given it to Abraham by means of a promise.”

It's a grace gift. God shows these two are incompatible. Whatever the Judaizers taught was a heresy, a false gospel, accursed gospel, a gospel that was authored by Satan. You can't tamper with salvation by faith alone, and you can't let the law nullify the promises, it says at the end of verse 17, when God gave the promise as a grace gift. So every sinner who trusts in Christ crucified for salvation, to every sinner to puts his faith in the risen Christ, the promise comes; and with it, 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.

Finally, the law says, “Do this, and live. Do this, and live.” The gospel says, “Receive this, and live. It's a gift.”

Our God, we thank You again for our wonderful time of worship and fellowship this morning. We thank You that we are recipients of Your unconditional, irrevocable, undeserved, gracious gift of salvation, life, eternal life. We thank You that we are the people of the promise, that we're not under the threat, that You delivered us from the curse. You rescued us from the curse by becoming a curse for us. We thank You that our sins were imputed to You, and God cursed You, and Your righteousness was imputed to us.

And everlastingly, God blesses us; and that this was something that we did not earn, but a gift of grace that we received. This is the gospel of salvation by faith alone, received as a gift of grace to those who believe in Christ alone. And all this to Your glory alone. Open hearts to the true understanding of the gospel, even in this hour, we pray. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2018 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<https://www.gty.org/about#copyright>).