



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

What is God's Promise to You?

GALATIANS 3.15-18

2/20/13

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Reflect for a moment on the first time you publicly committed yourself to a course of action if elected—that is to say, the first time you made a campaign promise. Now think of a few examples of campaign promises that those who made them failed to keep. The campaign promise is not held by most to be especially reliable. This breeds cynicism because a promise is supposed to be a sure commitment, almost a guarantee to future actions or rewards.

Paul introduced the promise of God to Abraham early on in his defense of the doctrine of justification by faith. He argues that God made a promise to Abraham that finds its fulfillment in the new life experienced by the Gentile believers to whom he writes. In reconstructing the arguments made by the Judaizers it seems likely that they had argued that the law had been added to God's covenant with Abraham. Paul argues the incompatible nature of the law and the promise as a basis for the inheritance.

Galatians 3.15-18:

¹⁵Brethren, 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.

¹⁶Now 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 you Seed," who is Christ.

¹⁷And 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.

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

THE CONFIRMATION OF THE PROMISE (15)

Paul begins by comparing a covenant ratified among men to one made by God Himself. If a covenant between men is unchangeable once ratified, how much more so when it is God

who makes the commitment? Any attempt to invalidate or to modify a covenant after it has been legally confirmed is set aside.

...IF IT IS CONFIRMED, NO ONE ANNULS OR ADDS TO IT.

The Judaizers are attempting to make changes to God's covenant with Abraham and his Seed which would serve to completely nullify its intent. To add the stipulations of the Mosaic law to the covenant made with Abraham is illegal!

THE SUBJECT OF THE PROMISE (16)

In what appears to be a parenthetical thought, Paul ties his argument here back to his introduction of Abraham in the previous paragraph. The only true sons of Abraham are those who share his faith, not necessarily his blood. Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law in order "that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

NOW TO ABRAHAM AND HIS SEED [WHO IS CHRIST] WERE THE PROMISES MADE.

Notice that the promise was made by God. God committed Himself to future action and to grant certain benefits to Abraham and ultimately to Christ and all who are in Him. In Genesis 15 we learn that Abraham slept through the sealing of the covenant with a sacrifice. This covenant is God committing Himself to Abraham with no conditions put upon Abraham. His is only to believe that God will fulfill that which He has promised.

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS ONLY: WEDNESDAY LUNCH AT THE AUSTIN CLUB (11:30AM OR UPON ADJOURNMENT, WHICHEVER IS LATER)

CAPITOL COMMUNITY STUDY: FRIDAY BREAKFAST @ 8AM IN MEMBERS' LOUNGE (E2.1002)

Texas

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Paul contends here that the Seed points to Christ. In Christ the promise is fulfilled that all the nations would be blessed through Abraham. Certainly Isaac, Jacob and the nation of Israel are comprehended in the word 'seed.' But ultimately the promise pointed to the Seed, who is Christ.

THE PRECEDENCE OF THE PROMISE (17)

"Now this is what I mean to say" would be a good rendering for the beginning of this verse. The promise not only preceded the law, but it preceded it by hundreds of years. The number of years mentioned here is a subject of much debate. It seems the best explanation would date the beginning of the 430 years at the final confirmation of the promise to Jacob recorded in Genesis 46 and the end at the giving of the law at Mt. Sinai.

Whatever the explanation, it added up in the understanding of the original readers and emphasized how long after the giving of the promise to Abraham the law was given. The point was to show the significant precedence that the era of promise had over the era of law. That being true, the law cannot annul a covenant promise given by God to Abraham and his Seed that had been long since ratified. To do so would make the promise meaningless.

THE FULFILLMENT OF THE PROMISE (18)

Paul seeks to demonstrate the incompatibility of the Abrahamic covenant and the Mosaic covenant as the basis for justification before God. If, he argues, the inheritance (receiving the benefits promised) comes by the works of the law, then it is no longer based upon God's promise, but man's performance. You cannot say that the inheritance is given based upon God's promise and the works of the law. One nullifies or cancels out the other.

"But," brings the argument to its conclusion. God gave it...by promise. The word used here for 'gave' is vitally important. It is a word that emphasizes the unconditional nature of the gift. It is freely bestowed as a gracious gift. It is given with no strings attached. Using the perfect tense, he describes past action with effects that continue into the present. Our inheritance in Christ is freely bestowed by God as a gracious gift on the basis of faith!

CONCLUSION

Are you standing upon that promise today?

Is your future hope resting upon the finished work of Christ or your own righteousness?

THE LAW...CANNOT ANNUL THE COVENANT THAT WAS CONFIRMED...IN CHRIST

Is it your commitment to God that is most prominent in your thinking or His to you?

The assurance of your inheritance rises from the fulfillment of God's promise in Christ.

The basis of your inheritance is faith in God's promise, not the works of the law.

GOD GAVE [THE INHERITANCE] TO ABRAHAM BY PROMISE.