

**GALATIANS - SERMON 12**  
**GALATIANS 3:15-19 — THE ABRAHAMIC & MOSAIC COVENANTS**  
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INTRODUCTION:

Read Galatians 3:15-29

In this chapter Paul has defended the doctrine of justification by faith alone apart from works of the law. He has done so by three lines of argumentation. First he appealed to the personal salvation history of the Galatians, vv 1-5. Secondly, Paul appealed to the example of Abraham's salvation, vv 6-9. Thirdly, Paul appeals to the expressions of Scripture, vv 10-12. Paul quoted three passages of Scripture in those three verses. By these three lines of argument Paul conclusively demonstrates that we are saved and accepted by God on the basis of faith alone apart from the works which we might perform.

How is it possible that acceptance with God is achieved through faith and not by works? The answer is that it is by Christ redeeming us from the curse of the law, vv 13-14. By so doing Christ has secured for us the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant and the promise of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Hence, it is so that justification is by faith, incorporation into the Abrahamic covenant is by faith, and receiving the promised Holy Spirit is by faith also. All of this is made possible by the redeeming work of Christ.

A great deal of the confusion that had arisen among the churches in Galatia over the issue of justification was due to a failure on the part of the Galatians to rightly understand the nature, the relationship, and the distinction between the Abrahamic Covenant and the Mosaic Covenant. It was the Abrahamic covenant that presented them with blessings yet it was by the Mosaic covenant that the Galatians were trying to be saved. Paul recognized the importance of understanding correctly the covenants. The covenants are the framework upon which God's whole redemptive plan is built. The redemptive plan will not be properly understood if the covenants are not properly understood. In Scripture there are four great covenants, the Noahic covenant, the Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, and the new covenant.

Paul in the remainder of Galatians chapter 3 and all of chapter 4, explains the nature, the relationship, and the distinction between the Abrahamic Covenant and the Mosaic Covenant. He will demonstrate and explain why one covenant (the Abrahamic) is perpetual and the other is temporary (Mosaic). One covenant is for the purpose of restraining sin in the nation of Israel (Mosaic). The other (the Abrahamic) is for the purpose of bringing the Messiah to all nations and people. The latter covenant was for the people of God in their immaturity while the former covenant is for the people of God in their maturity. One covenant is based upon law and performance while the other is founded upon grace and promise.

Paul also shows how the Abrahamic covenant has been developed and fulfilled in the new covenant. He shows how circumcision of body has been replaced by circumcision of heart. He shows how physical descendants and physical seed has been replaced by spiritual seed and descendants. He shows how the promise of the land of Canaan has been replaced with the promise of the land in heaven.

A failure to understand the transition and development of the Abrahamic covenant into the new covenant that leads to the errors of Dispensationalism on the one hand and Paedobaptism on the other. Dispensationalists minimize the relationship between the Abrahamic covenant and the new covenant. They virtually say that there is no relationship between them at all. However, Paedobaptists minimize the distinction between the two covenants.

OUTLINE:

- I THE PRIMACY AND INVIOABILITY OF THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT.
  - A THE ILLUSTRATION OF INVIOABILITY OF A COVENANT, v 15.
  - B THE STATEMENT OF THE ORIGINAL COVENANT, v 16.
  - C THE APPEARANCE OF A SUBSEQUENT COVENANT, v 17.
- II THE PURPOSE AND FUNCTION OF THE MOSAIC COVENANT. (NEXT SERMON)

I THE PRIMACY AND INVIOABILITY OF THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

By primacy we mean the fact that the Abrahamic covenant came first.

By inviolability we mean the fact that the Abrahamic covenant is that which cannot be violated, invalidated, or nullified, vv 15-18.

A The illustration of inviolability of a covenant, v 15.

Galatians 3:15

*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.*

A covenant is simply an arrangement that defines the relationship between two parties.

Once a contract is accepted and entered into, it cannot be amended or set aside apart from its terms. A third party cannot affect a legitimate covenant agreement. What, then, was the original agreement to which Paul refers.

B The statement of the original covenant, v 16.

This is a reference to the original institution of the Abrahamic covenant.

Genesis 22:15-18

*Then the Angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said: "By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son; blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."*

Paul states the essence of this covenant in Galatians 3:16

*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.*

The covenant was a promise to Abraham and to his seed. Reading the statement from Genesis 22 the reference to *seed* seems to be a reference to the natural or physical seed of Abraham. However, Paul, when interpreting this passage<sup>1</sup>, makes it very clear that such is not the case. The *seed* referred to is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. The covenant was to be carried out through Abraham's physical seed until the final descendant and seed, Jesus Christ, should appear. With Jesus, the final physical seed of Abraham, the physical seed of Abraham [with regard to covenant significance] is ended. Jesus Christ had no physical children to continue the line or seed of Abraham. Further, Jesus Christ did have spiritual children and that is the continuation of the seed of Abraham according to promise.

The Abrahamic covenant started out with Isaac and Jacob as a physical lineage until the final physical descendant, Jesus Christ. When Jesus Christ arose then children of the covenant were and are begotten by the new birth, the second birth which is a spiritual birth.

This concept of spiritual children is spoken of throughout the Scriptures.

Matthew 18:3

*. . . and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."*

Here Christ is comparing conversion to physical birth, the becoming of a little child. Christ often referred to His disciples as if they were His offspring or children.

Mark 10:24

*And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, "Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God!"*

John 13:33

*"Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, 'Where I am going, you cannot come,' so now I say to you."*

John 21:5-6

*Then Jesus said to them, "Children, have you any food?" They answered Him, "No." And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish."*

Isaiah 53:8-11

*He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken. And they made His grave with the wicked; but with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He*

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<sup>1</sup>Yet is it actually the Holy Spirit who interprets this passage for us, not Paul. Paul is the inspired penman, but God the Holy Spirit is the Author, hence our confidence in this interpretation.

*has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities.*

Jesus Christ had a *seed*, children according to this passage. It had to be a spiritual seed since the Lord Jesus Christ never married and never had physical offspring. In verse 11 the allusion is to child birth by the reference to the *labor of His soul*. The children of Jesus are His spiritual seed, His disciples who have been converted and begotten by Him spiritually through the gospel. This is how the generations of Abraham are carried on now.

1 Corinthians 4:14-15

*I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you. For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.*

The apostle continues this theme of a spiritual lineage in place of a physical one. After Christ's incarnation the matter of physical descent became a matter of utter irrelevance.

Matthew 3:9

*". . . and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones."*

What is relevant presently is not one's physical genealogy, but his spiritual one.

Philemon 1:10

*I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains. . .*

The children of believers are those begotten through the gospel, not necessarily through physical procreation.

1 Timothy 1:2

*To Timothy, a true son in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.*

The whole principle of descent has been transformed from a physical to spiritual one. This is why we baptize spiritual babies, not physical ones.

So Abraham begot Christ and Christ begets children spiritually, not physically. This is the fundamental error lying at the heart of paedobaptism, an inability to understand and comprehend the transformation that occurred when Christ came.

- C The appearance of a subsequent covenant, v 17.  
Galatians 3:17

*And this I say, that the law (the Mosaic covenant), 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 (the Abrahamic covenant) of no effect.*

In this verse another covenant is mentioned, the Mosaic. This subsequent covenant was established 430 years after the Abrahamic covenant and at Sinai. This subsequent covenant, the Mosaic covenant is often referred to as the Old Covenant.

Can the reference to *the law* in this part of Galatians be assumed as a reference to the ten commandments?

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There are times with the term *the law* does refer to the ten commandments. At other times it refers to the Mosaic covenant. It can also refer to the totality of God's revelation. In the context of Galatians 3 the term *the law* refers to the Mosaic covenant which was established at Mount Sinai, Exodus 19.

This subsequent covenant (the Mosaic covenant) could do nothing to annul or amend the Abrahamic covenant established 430 years earlier. In the original covenant salvation was promised to all nations through the promised *seed* and this subsequent covenant in no way changed that promise.

The Judaizers were saying that the principle of salvation by faith established by the Abrahamic covenant had been superceded, annulled and changed by the consequent Mosaic covenant. Paul is denying this emphatically. The Judaizers were saying that obedience to the Mosaic covenant would now be the condition for obtaining the salvation promised in the Abrahamic covenant. They were saying that the terms of the Abrahamic covenant had been modified by the Mosaic covenant.

Paul shows that this modification of the former by the latter covenant is entirely impossible.

Galatians 3:18

*For if the inheritance is of the law (the Mosaic covenant), it is no longer of promise (the Abrahamic covenant); but God gave it to Abraham by promise.*

Paul is saying that the two covenants, as means to justification and salvation are mutually exclusive and contrary. The Mosaic covenant preached 'do it and live'. The Abrahamic covenant preaches 'believe and live'. These are two different systems which are opposites. The two systems, as systems of salvation, are contrary. Which system is correct? The answer is found in the final part of verse 18, *but God gave it to Abraham by promise*. It was always to be by promise and never by law-keeping. The Mosaic covenant was never intended to be a vehicle by which salvation was to be conveyed.

The next question was then what was the purpose of the Mosaic covenant? If not to save, then why this subsequent covenant?

II THE PURPOSE AND FUNCTION OF THE MOSAIC COVENANT. (NEXT SERMON)

Galatians 3:19

*What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator.*

Hymn # 402