

Lesson 6:

"The Priority of the Promise"

[The lesson this week addresses Galatians 3:15-29. In 1900, this Scripture was covered by the following 4 weeks lessons.]

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THE PROMISE OF THE INHERITANCE SURE.

October 20, 1900.

(Gal. 3:15-18, R. V.)

"BRETHREN, I speak after the manner of men: Though it be but a man's covenant, yet when it hath been confirmed, no one maketh it void, or addeth thereto. Now to Abraham were the promises spoken, and to his seed. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy Seed, which is Christ. Now this I say: A covenant confirmed beforehand by God, the law, which came four hundred and thirty years after, doth not disannul, so as to make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no more of promise; but God hath granted it to Abraham by promise."

All the suggestive hints, and instruction as to careful study and review, that have accompanied all the preceding lessons, apply here. It is absolutely essential that you know all the preceding part of this epistle, in order that you may well understand what follows. Study and think. But do not mistake speculation for thinking. Do not try to make a meaning out of what is written, but fix your minds upon the sentences until the meaning that is in them reveals itself. The mental discipline to be obtained in studying such a portion of Scripture as this until you have mastered it, is worth more than can be computed. That, however, is only a secondary matter, after all. The great gain to us is the knowledge of God and His salvation. In the Scripture God takes us into His confidence, and reveals to us His secrets.

QUESTIONS.

When a covenant made by man is confirmed, how sure is it?

"No one maketh it void, or addeth thereto."

To whom were the promises made?

"To Abraham and his seed."

By whom were the promises made?

How explicit was the promise?

"He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to thy Seed."

Who is the seed to whom the promise was made?

"And to thy Seed, which is Christ."

Is there more than one seed to whom the promise was made?

"He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of *one*, And to thy Seed, which is Christ."

Of whom is Christ the seed?

"To Abraham and his seed were the promises made; . . . and to thy Seed, which is Christ."

Who are joined in the promises?

"Abraham and his seed."

Then when Christ receives the promises here referred to, who must share them with Him?

Since even a man's covenant, once confirmed, can not be made void, or added to, what of God's covenant?

"The covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law . . . can not disannul."

How long after the confirming of the covenant did the law come in?

"Four hundred and thirty years after."

Could the giving of the law make any change in the covenant already made with Abraham?

"Though it be but a man's covenant, yet when it hath been confirmed, no one maketh it void, or addeth thereto." Likewise, "the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, can not disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect."

What would be the result of the disannulling of the covenant, if such a thing were possible?

It would "make the promise of none effect."

What, then, is the covenant which God made and confirmed?

What would be the case if the inheritance were by the law?

It would be "no more of promise."

How did God give it to Abraham?

"God gave it to Abraham by promise."

What was it that God gave to Abraham by promise?

"The inheritance."

Then to what did the promises made to Abraham and his seed have reference?

"God gave it [the inheritance] to Abraham by promise."

To whom besides Abraham was the inheritance promised?

"And to thy Seed, which is Christ."

NOTES.

1. Since even a man's covenant can not be in any way changed after it has been confirmed, it follows that the same thing must be most emphatically the case with a covenant confirmed by God, "who can not lie."
2. Christ is the seed of Abraham, and the only seed to whom the promise was made. He is both spiritual and literal. He is a real, literal, personal being, and He is spiritual, even a "quickening Spirit."
3. In verse 17 we see the conclusion of verse 15. A man's covenant once confirmed, can not be changed; so the covenant which God made with Abraham, can not be made void or altered in any way by the entering of the law four hundred and thirty years afterward.
4. Verse 17 is a reversed sentence, the object coming first instead of last, and therefore some people have difficulty in reading it correctly. The verse simply states that the law can not make the promise void, and disannul the covenant that was made and confirmed by God four hundred and thirty years before.
5. Note that the covenant and the promise are the same. To disannul the covenant is to make the promise of none effect. We see this when we pay attention to the connection between verses 15 and 16, and also between 17 and 18. Do not go to Webster or to any other dictionary for a definition of "covenant," when God's covenant is in question. Go instead to the Bible. Dictionaries do not make language; their purpose is only to show how it is used; the dictionary makers have not considered the Bible usage in this case. It is so rare for men to promise anything without expecting an equivalent, that it has been taken for granted that it is the same with God; and so we have a covenant defined as "a mutual agreement of two or more persons," etc. But "who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been His counselor? or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto Him again? For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things." Rom. 11:34-36. God promises freely; our part is simply to accept.
6. Do not forget that Abraham is one of the leading characters in this chapter. It is the covenant made with him that is here referred to. Carefully avoid the error of reading any one verse as though it stood alone, having no connection with what precedes and follows. In studying one verse, do not forget what you have learned from preceding verses.
7. In this lesson we learn what "the promise of the Spirit" is. It is the inheritance. This is made clear by verse 18. That which God promised to Abraham and his seed was the inheritance. See Gen. 17:2-8. This covenant was confirmed by the oath of God. See Heb. 6:13-18 and Gen. 22:16-18. The gift of the Spirit is the pledge of the inheritance. Eph. 1:13, 14.

THE LAW NOT AGAINST THE PROMISE.

October 27, 1900.

(Gal. 3:17-21, first part, R. V.)

"Now this I say: A covenant confirmed beforehand by God, the law, which came four hundred and thirty years after, doth not disannul, so as to make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no more of promise; but God hath granted it to Abraham by promise. What then is the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come, to whom the promise hath been made; and it was ordained through angels by the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator is not a mediator of one; but God is one. Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid."

In each of these lessons we repeat a portion of the scripture contained in the preceding lesson, so that the connection may be maintained, and that the student may have opportunity to become thoroughly familiar with it. To this end also, we take but a very small portion in advance. There is surely no reason why everybody should not get the text thoroughly fixed in mind, when so small a portion is given each week; yet the brightest student need not feel that the lessons are too short, for in this portion of the Scripture every sentence is rich enough in suggestion for an entire lesson.

In the first part of verse 19 the reading of the common version is better than that of the revision. Leaving out the unnecessary word "serveth," which, as indicated by being in *Italic*, has been added by the translators, and not translated from the Greek, we have the question, "Wherefore then the law?" That is the better rendering of the Greek text, and the question is very pertinent, as will be seen by any one who closely follows the line of thought.

It should be noted that the words "God forbid," which are frequently found in the English translation of the New Testament, are not at all a translation of what is found in the Greek text. The word "God" is not in the corresponding sentence in the Greek. The best rendering that could be given would be "not at all," or "not by any means." The expression is a very emphatic negative.

QUESTIONS.

How long before the giving of the law at Sinai was the covenant made and confirmed to Abraham?

By whom and to whom were the promises made?

How was the covenant confirmed?

The covenant having been confirmed, what could the law do?

What relation have the covenant and the promise?

Concerning what was the covenant made?

How did God give the inheritance to Abraham?

By what, then, does the inheritance certainly not come?

Since the inheritance comes solely through the promise of God, and not by the law four hundred and thirty years afterward, what question naturally arises?

"Wherefore then the law?"

What is the answer to this question?

"It was added [spoken] because of transgressions."

What comes by the law?

"By the law is the knowledge of sin." Rom. 3:20.

How long was the law to stand as the witness against sill?

"Till the seed should come."

What seed?

"The seed to whom the promise was made."

What promise?

The promise of an inheritance.

To whom was this inheritance promised equally with the seed?

"To Abraham and his seed were the promises made."

Through whose agency was the law given?

"Through angels."

In whose hand was it?

"In the hand of a mediator."

Could the law then be against the promise of God, although it came in after the promise was confirmed?

Not by any means.

NOTES.

1. Remember that to Abraham and his seed were the promises made, and that the covenant was confirmed by God with an oath. Because God could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself. The covenant with Abraham is summed up in one word-inheritance. Compare Gen. 17:4-11 with Rom. 4:9-13. God promised to give Abraham and his seed the whole earth, not in its present condition, but made new. "We, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." 2 Peter 3:13.
2. Righteousness will dwell in this inheritance, for it can be gained only through righteousness--the righteousness of faith. The inheritance is a free gift, however, and therefore the righteousness that wins it is a free gift from God. "For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith." Rom. 4:13. The "free gift," "the gift by grace," is "the gift of righteousness." Rom. 5:15-17.
3. This covenant also embraces everlasting life, for it is to be an everlasting inheritance. In the confirmation of the covenant by the oath of God, it was said to

Abraham, "Thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies." Gen. 22:17. This means nothing less than the destruction of death, for "the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." 1 Cor. 15:26, Abraham received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had before he was circumcised, that he might be the father of all them that believe, whether circumcised or uncircumcised. Rom: 4:11. All who believe are Abraham's seed; therefore the promises to Abraham and his seed include the resurrection of all the righteous, and the destruction of death; which of course means an end of sin, and the renewing of the earth. All this is given by the Lord as the reward of the righteousness, which is itself His gift to all who believe.

4. This covenant was confirmed four hundred and thirty years before the law was given from Sinai; therefore the entering of the law would have no effect upon it whatever. God never meant to have any one think that the inheritance of righteousness was to be obtained by means of the law given at Sinai; for in that case He would have been taking back His promise; "for if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise," and "He can not lie."
5. "Wherefore then the law?" What was the use of giving it? It was spoken because of transgressions,--because of faithlessness, for "whatsoever is not of faith is sin." "The law entered, that the offense might abound" (Rom 5:20); "that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful" (Rom. 7:13). "But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."
6. How long would the law have this duty to perform,--to testify against sinners and to stand as a witness to their faithlessness and disloyalty? "Until the seed should come to whom the promise was made." The seed "to whom the promise was made" is not yet come. Remember that Abraham is the father of all them that believe, so that the seed will not be fully come until all who will believe shall have come to the possession of the inheritance. Then will the promise be fulfilled. There will then be no more need of a law to remind men of their sins, for the law will be in the heart of each one, so that there will be no sin. The name of Christ the King will be "THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS."
7. What assurance have we that we can ever be thus at peace with the law which convicts us of sin and condemns us to death? This, that it was ordained "in the hand of a Mediator," which is Christ, "for there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." 1 Tim. 2:5. He is the medium by which the kingdom of God and His righteousness are conveyed to us. We have no need to fear the thunders of Sinai, so long as we remember that the law which thunders is in the hand of a Mediator, who gave Himself for our sins, and that the thunders proceed from the throne of grace. Even the thunders of Sinai are but the "loud voice" of the message of God's everlasting love. See Deut. 33:2, 3.
8. "Is the law then against the promises of God?"--Far from it; not by any means. What then? It is in harmony with the promise. (1) God did not give it without a purpose; (2) it was not given as a means of obtaining the inheritance which is wholly by promise; (3) but the law is not against the promise; (4) therefore the law must be in the line of the promises. Yes; the law proclaimed from Sinai declares the righteousness which

God put into the heart of faithful Abraham, and which He has promised to put into the hearts of all who believe. So, however great it may show our sins to be, however high and impossible to be fulfilled by us are its requirements, so much the more may we rest with rejoicing in the promise and oath of God, who for His own sake blots out all our sins, and works in us His own righteousness. The law indeed requires things of us impossible for weak human nature to perform, but God can do that which is impossible for men; and the immeasurable greatness of the requirements of the law, only reveal to us the immeasurable greatness of God's promise.

PRISONERS OP HOPE.

November 3, 1900.

(Gal. 3:18-26, R. V.)

"IF the inheritance is of the law, it is no more of promise; but God hath granted it to Abraham by promise. What then is the law? [Wherefore then the law?] It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise hath been made; and it was ordained through angels by the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator is not a mediator of one; but God is one. Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid [not by any means]; for if there had been a law given which could make alive, verily righteousness would have been by the law. Howbeit the Scripture hath shut up all things under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before faith came, we were kept in ward under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. So that the law hath been our tutor to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith is come, we are no longer under a tutor. For ye are all the sons of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus."

"The Scripture hath concluded *all* under sin," "for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." The rendering "shut up" is, however, much better than "concluded," solely because it is simpler. The word "concluded" is borrowed from the Latin, and means "shut up," but since it is used in so many accommodated senses, the plain Anglo-Saxon equivalent is more expressive. The idea to be conveyed is that of being shut up in prison, as is shown by the words "in ward."

To the earnest Bible student it will not be necessary to say, Do not become tired of the frequent repetition of the Scripture text, nor of the fact that so few verses are included in each lesson; for he will be glad of as much time and opportunity as possible to meditate upon the sacred words, so that they may unfold their treasures to his understanding. Before studying the verses in this lesson, go over the entire chapter from the beginning, and be sure that you grasp the force of every sentence and every word, and its relation to every other. There is much sweetness in the words of the Lord,--they are sweeter than honey and the honeycomb,--but they often need to be held in the mouth a long time in order that the sweetness may be extracted.

QUESTIONS.

By what means does the inheritance come?

How did God give it to Abraham?

How sure was the promise made?

What effect could the entering of the law have upon the covenant thus confirmed?

What, then, was the use of the law?

What has the law to do with transgressions?

"By the law is the knowledge of sin."

For how long a time will the law stand as the revealer and condemner of sin?

Why not longer?

Because after the coming of the Lord and the restoration of all things, there will be no sin to be found in the universe.

In whose hand is the law even when given from Sinai? What does this show?

That even the awfulness of Sinai only emphasizes the abundance of the grace of God, and shows the greatness of God's gift by grace.

Is the law then against the promises of God?

How, then, does it stand in relation to them?

Under what conditions would righteousness have come by the law?

Can the law make alive?

"The law worketh wrath." Rom. :15.

What has the law--the Scripture--done?

"The Scripture hath shut up all under sin."

Why hath the Scripture shut up all under sin? Is it to drive them to destruction?

"That the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe."

In what condition is a man who does not believe?

"Before faith came, we were kept in ward under the law, shut up." "He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God." John 3:18.

Unto what are the unbelieving sinners shut up?

"Shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed."

What is, then, the office of the law?

"The law hath been our tutor to bring us unto Christ."

What for?

"That we might be justified by faith."

What takes place when faith comes?

"We are no longer under a tutor."

Why not?

"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus."

NOTES.

1. The law coming in at Sinai was not as an antagonist to the promises of God, but a faithful ally. The law was contained in the promise to Abraham; for the everlasting inheritance is only the fruit of everlasting righteousness, which is manifested in the lives of believers, because the Holy Spirit of promise writes the law in their hearts, making it their life. The entering of the law, with all the terrors of the day of judgment, show how great is this righteousness, and how utterly impossible it is for anybody to attain to it, and thus gain the inheritance by his own efforts. Thus the law from Sinai

works in perfect harmony with the promise, by throwing everybody back upon the sure promise and the oath of God.

2. "By one man sin came into the world, and death by sin." Sin is death. We were all "dead in trespasses and sins." If the law could make alive, surely righteousness would have come by it, and then there would have been no need of the promises of God. But "the law worketh wrath." It shows the sinfulness of sin, making the offense which seemed trivial, or of which we were ignorant, to abound, to appear just as it is in the sight of God. This is a most useful office. The one who will sharply call our attention to the fact that we are about to walk over a precipice, or to swallow a poison, and thus give us an opportunity to avoid the impending destruction, is counted as our friend.
3. So the Scripture--the law--hath shut up all men under sin, keeping watch over them, not relaxing one jot or tittle of its claims. We can not break out of that prison; there is only one door of escape, and that is faith in Jesus Christ. The law, instead of requiring men to keep it in order to be saved, as some suppose; will not allow anybody to be saved except by faith in Christ Jesus. The righteousness which is by the faith of Jesus Christ is witnessed to by the law as well as the prophets. See Rom. 3:20, 22; Acts 10:43.
4. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a pedagogue. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Rom. 5:1. The law does not relax any of its claims; but we no longer feel its grip upon us; it no longer holds us in prison, because, seeking its precepts, we walk at liberty. Ps. 119:45. The undefiled in the way walk in the law of the Lord (Ps. 119:1), and the law being in them, it can no more be *against* them. By faith in Christ we are sons of God, the Spirit bearing witness that we are sons; and so, since we walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit, the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us. Rom. 8:4.

PUTTING ON CHRIST; ONE IN HIM.

November 10, 1900.

(Gal. 3:24-29, R. V.)

"THE law hath been our tutor to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith is come, we are no longer under a tutor. For ye are all sons of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ. There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female; for ye are all one man in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise."

We now come to the close of this most remarkable chapter, and with the six weeks' study that we put upon it, each student should have a firm grasp of all its statements. Of course no one can expect fully to understand the chapter in that time, but we ought at least to have made so much of its acquaintance that it is no longer a stranger to us. As usual, review thoroughly from the beginning before taking up the new lesson, and then study the verses of the lesson until you could no more forget them than you could forget your own name.

QUESTIONS.

State the relation of the law to the promises.

Why was the law given at Sinai?

Was the standard of righteousness greater after that than before?

In what state does the law hold all who do not believe? To what end?

What, then, is the law to those who do not believe?

What takes place when faith comes to us?

What does belief do for us?

"Ye are all the children of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus." "As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name." John 1:12. Believing Christ is receiving Him.

Who have "put on Christ"?

"As many of you as were baptized into Christ."

What, then, can there no more be?

"There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female."

Why not?

"For ye are all one man in Christ Jesus."

Since we are one man in Christ, what follows?

"If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed."

And what then?

"And heirs according to the promise." "If children then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ." Rom. 8:17.

NOTES.

1. The law has shut us up in prison as transgressors, yet not without hope. The door of mercy was open, and as soon as we believed, we were free; no longer slaves of sin, but sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus,
2. Belief in Christ includes baptism into Christ. when the eunuch asked, "What doth hinder me to be baptized?" Philip replied, "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest;" and the eunuch said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God," whereupon Philip baptized him. Acts 8:36-38. Jesus said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Mark 16:16. It is thus that he put on Christ.
3. Bear in mind that it is only by being baptized *into Christ* that we put on Christ. It is not the repetition of a formula, nor the mere application of a water--being buried in it--that constitutes the true baptism--baptism into Christ. "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death?" Rom. 6:3. Baptism into Christ means the giving up of our lives, being crucified with Him, that we may live a new life. So it is "no longer I, but Christ liveth in me." This is a new life, the putting on of "the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." Eph. 4:24.
4. "One in Christ Jesus." "One man in Christ Jesus." There is but one Man, and that is Christ. God created man in His own image in the beginning, male and female, "and called their name Adam,"--man. Gen. 5:2. But they fell, and so became less than men, yes, less than dumb brutes in the knowledge of God's ways; for, says God, "the ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, My people doth not consider." Isa 1:3. "Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but My people know not the judgment of the Lord." Jer. 8:7. By faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God, we come "unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." Eph. 4:13. Christ makes "in Himself of twain one new man," so making peace, Eph. 2:15. Just as it takes the whole of creation to reveal the whole of the glory of God, so it takes all the believers in all the world to reveal the perfect Christ.
5. "If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ." Compare verse 29 with verse 16. There is but one Seed, and that is Christ. But in Christ all things consist. In Him we are not many, but one, and He is the One. Therefore we also form a part of "the seed to whom the promise was made." The promise is as sure to us as to Christ, and will be ours as soon as it is His, if we abide in Him. So here again we see that the coming of the seed to whom the promise was made, embraces the gathering of all the faithful in the kingdom of God.