

We stand when we read our passage from God's Word because we want to emphasize the difference between the pure Word of God and teaching about the Word. While teaching may or may not be inspired, every word from God is sacred. If you have not yet listened to the blog on Bible numerics, take the time to go to the church web site and listen to that brief blog on the incredible mystery of the patterns of seven woven throughout every passage in both the Old and New Testament. This divine fingerprint of God bolsters our faith in the purity of the revelation of God in the Bible. The conviction of the sacredness and power of the Word is why the Apostle Paul told his disciple Timothy to <sup>15</sup> *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.* 2 Timothy 2:15 There is no greater study in all the world than the study of God in His Word.

There are times when I offer a person a Bible or the Gospel of John that we have in front of the church, and they will reply that they already read it. I've read the Bible almost every day since I was a small child, and I am still finding treasures that, as the psalmist says, are worth more than thousands of gold and silver (Psalm 119:72<sup>i</sup>). While the world is so caught up in the things that are seen and soon to pass away, the Word of God directs our spiritual eyes to that which is of infinitely more value, for it is eternal (2 Corinthians 4:18<sup>ii</sup>). *Forever, O Lord, your Word is firmly fixed in the heavens!* Psalm 119:89 And yet, so few will devote themselves to understanding the Word of God. What we are devoted to declares the condition of our souls. To what are you devoted?

Our passage today is one of Paul's deep subjects, one I believe was revealed to him when he was in the wilderness of Arabia for three years trying to understand what he had missed in Scripture, how he could have ended up persecuting the Messiah (Galatians 1:17,18<sup>iii</sup>). Going back to the beginning of Scripture, he discovered a promise in Genesis that came before the Law to which he had been so devoted. He was devoted to the Word, but without the Spirit helping him to interpret the Word (1 Corinthians 2:14<sup>iv</sup>), he had passed over one of the greatest treasures of Scripture: the promises to Abraham. Because those in the church of Galatia were recently influenced by teachers who claimed the laws of Moses needed to be observed, Paul was trying to explain what he had discovered. He is pointing to Scripture and the revelation that corrected his misunderstanding.

<sup>15</sup> *To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified.* Galatians 3:15 You cannot add to or change a covenant that has been ratified. Once signed you cannot say, "Oh wait, I want to add one more condition," or "I didn't really mean to sign that!" God made a covenant with Abraham. It was a done deal. And as the following verses will explain, whatever came later could not change the covenant, for it was solemnly promised by God.

<sup>16</sup> *Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ.* Galatians 3:16 God promised a singular male seed from Abraham would bless the world (Genesis 12:3,7; 22:18). Though the word "seed," translated as offspring here, can imply many, in this case in Hebrew it is masculine singular. That means Paul believes in divine inspiration and protection of Scripture. The original promise goes all the way back to Eve who was also promised a singular masculine seed would crush the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15<sup>v</sup>). That offspring or seed is the Messiah, a descendant

of Abraham, whose sacrificial death has brought salvation to the world, just as the prophet Isaiah predicted (Isaiah 49:6<sup>vi</sup>; 9:6<sup>vii</sup>). Paul's understanding of the Genesis promise of one male descendant of Abraham being the Messiah is consistent with the targums and Jewish thought.

Targums are Jewish commentaries written in the first to third centuries but containing earlier Jewish teaching. This means that in them we can see the way Jews understood the Scriptures before Christian influence affected their interpretation. The Palestinian targum of Genesis 22:18 reads, *And all the peoples of the earth shall be blessed through the righteousness of thy son, because thou hast obeyed My word.* This tells us that what Paul is explaining was consistent with Jewish understanding regarding the coming of a descendant of Abraham being a single person who would bless the world through his righteousness. This is very important wording because Isaiah 53 tells us <sup>11</sup> *Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.* Isaiah 53:11 (underline mine)

If we believe the inspiration of Scripture, we can see from this prophecy that there was coming a righteous One, a servant of God, and it is out of the anguish of His soul that many will be accounted as righteous because He will bear their iniquity. The question before the Galatians is what role the law plays in making us righteous. Paul is taking them back to the promise to Abraham and telling them that it is the descendant from Abraham who blesses the world by making us righteous before God because of His own righteousness. After living a sinless life, He took our sins upon Himself on the cross and gave us His righteousness. Hallelujah!

<sup>17</sup> *This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void.* Genesis 3:17 Let us try to carefully follow Paul's thought. The law given to Moses could not void the covenant God made with Abraham 430 years earlier. God already ratified that covenant; therefore, it cannot be changed. Verse 15 declares God's promises cannot be altered once given on an unconditional basis. The promise was unconditional as it was given in response to Abraham demonstrating his faith in God's Word (Genesis 22:18<sup>viii</sup>). God did not add any requirements. Abraham believed God's Word to him, and it was counted to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6<sup>ix</sup>). The covenant was God's response to Abraham's faith in what God said. God said that through Isaac Abraham would have as many descendants as the stars he could count in the heavens. So, Abraham reasoned that if he did sacrifice Isaac, God would raise him from death (Hebrews 11:19<sup>x</sup>). This foreshadowed us believing in the resurrection of Jesus (Romans 10:9<sup>xi</sup>).

Since the law given to Moses came after the covenant was given by God, it does not supersede the covenant. It was a separate set of terms for physical prosperity for the nation of Israel. If you could live the law completely without failing in any point, it would bring life (Leviticus 18:5<sup>xii</sup>), but the only One to ever do that was Jesus (1 Peter 2:22<sup>xiii</sup>). That means the law's instructions pointed out our fallen condition and leads us to recognize our need for the Messiah.

<sup>18</sup> *For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.* Galatians 3:18 The covenant with Abraham was a promise to him because he believed God's Word. The laws of Moses did not give the promise of righteousness, nor does obeying the law bring in that kind of promise. It only

promises a temporary covering of sin and physical prosperity *if* one obeys it. Paul is noting the difference between the two covenants. The law promised physical blessings for obedience. The promise to Abraham was given because he believed God and acted in faith (James 2:22<sup>xiv</sup>). That promised blessing to the people of the world does not have a condition attached. It is received not by obedience but by faith. **Receiving that promise, Jesus as our Savior, only requires our faith to believe.** That is when we receive the inheritance of righteousness by faith just as Abraham received it.

Since we are all fallen people incapable of being holy on our own how can we choose to believe? Isn't our nature set against believing? It is! But the Holy Spirit convicts of sin (John 16:8<sup>xv</sup>). He brings the light of Jesus to everyone who comes into the world (John 1:9<sup>xvi</sup>). He sets before all who ever live the choice Joshua set before the people of Israel. "*Choose this day whom you will serve*" (Joshua 24:15a<sup>xvii</sup>)! And with the vision of the two paths clarified by the Holy Spirit, we are enabled to make a clear choice: self or God!

*<sup>19</sup> Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary.* Galatians 3:19 If salvation has always been by grace through faith, why did God give Israel the law? Mankind needed something to curb our destructive tendencies until the Messiah came. The law was a guideline to live productive lives. It is full of pictures of the coming Messiah and why we need Him. It contained judicial laws, ceremonial laws, and moral laws outlined in the Ten Commandments.

We should understand that judicial and ceremonial laws were given verbally to Moses during his forty days on the mountain. But the moral laws were written in stone by the finger of God (Exodus 31:18<sup>xviii</sup>). When Moses came down and saw the people had broken the all the moral laws, in his righteous anger he smashed the stone tablets. He returned to the mountain for another forty days, miraculously sustained by God, and the finger of God again wrote them in stone. So, when we talk about doing away with the law because Christ has come, we are talking about the judicial and ceremonial laws. They were given on a temporal basis until the coming of the promised Messiah. The moral law however was written in stone, meaning it does not change. What changed was the means of atoning for our moral failures was no longer the shadow but the reality. By that I mean that the blood of animals only showed the seriousness of sin. They did not remove sin. God was never pleased with them (Psalm 40:6<sup>xix</sup>). The only way to really remove our sins was God's provision through Christ, the sinless One, taking our sins and the penalty upon Himself.

Though Christ has come, we are still commanded to worship only the one true living God and have no other gods before Him (Exodus 20:3<sup>xx</sup>). We are still forbidden to worship idols, for no manmade image can represent the eternal Father God who is a spirit. We are still forbidden to commit murder, adultery, theft, lie, perjure ourselves etc (Exodus 20:13-16<sup>xxi</sup>; Mark 10:19<sup>xxii</sup>). That is because those forbidden things are inconsistent with who God is. He does not lie. He is faithful. He is the only true God.

The promise of the Offspring came first. Then the laws given through Moses came to help the people get through life until He came. Without the Holy Spirit living in the hearts of mankind, there needed to be those laws to guide people in the best way to live until Messiah came and made a way for a New Covenant and the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Living as God intended and in accord with His nature is by design the best way to

carry out our sojourn here (1 Peter 2:11<sup>xxiii</sup>). However, none of us can live up to that standard without failing (Romans 3:23<sup>xxiv</sup>). That is why we needed the Righteous One to do it in our place and to take our punishment.

<sup>20</sup> *Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one.* Ephesians 3:20 Is this intermediary Moses or is Paul speaking of the angels who were involved (Acts 7:53<sup>xxv</sup>; Hebrews 2:2<sup>xxvi</sup>)? Or perhaps he was speaking of both. But in the case of the promise with Abraham, God Himself made the covenant. This tells us of the superiority of that covenant over the later one and of the unconditional promise with Abraham.

Paul is saying that God is not contradicting His promise to Abraham with the law, but rather He was preparing people for the coming promise and inheritance. Moses met with angels on Sinai and God blessed the people with the law to be their guardian, or as another translation puts it their schoolmaster, until Jesus came to live a righteous life and offer it up for our sins. That makes those who receive His righteousness inheritors of the faith of Abraham.

<sup>21</sup> *Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law.* Galatians 3:21 Six times in Leviticus and once in Exodus (31:13<sup>xxvii</sup>), after telling the people how important it is to obey the law, a command is followed by this phrase, "*I am the Lord who sanctifies you!*" We could read that as meaning, "Obey because I, the LORD, set you apart." Or we could read it, "I ask you to obey, but it is I the LORD who makes you holy." In fact, the Exodus verse declares that the command was given so that you may know that it is the LORD who sanctifies. The implication can be that it is not obedience for we are unable to obey, but the LORD Himself who makes us holy by His own work, the blessing that was coming, the sacrifice of the Messiah.

Psalms 14:1-3<sup>xxviii</sup> declares none are righteous, not even one single person. That is because the Messiah had not yet come and through His sacrifice sanctified us. If we read those seven verses as the LORD sanctified Israel, therefore, they were to obey the law, the psalmist could not write that "none are righteous" (Proverbs 20:9<sup>xxix</sup>; Romans 11:32<sup>xxx</sup>). Therefore, the law was pointing people to trust in God to sanctify them through the coming Messiah, the blessing that was to come through a descendant of Abraham.

If there were ever the right conditions for the law to give life it was with the Children of Israel in the wilderness. They saw the miracles daily. They were just set free from slavery. They were a new nation with a set of laws delivered by God in the smoke and fire and trembling of Sinai. They were isolated from the rest of the world. They had just ten main rules. It was a whole nation motivated to keep these laws and be blessed physically, but even then, they did not come anywhere close to obeying them. The law could not give them righteousness! That is what the law itself declared in its repetition of sacrifices and in the expression, "*I am the Lord who sanctifies you.*" In addition, there was no sacrifice for intentional sin. That alone shows you it was only in place for a time until God provided the sacrifice, just as Abraham declared on the very mountain where Jesus would one day be crucified. <sup>8</sup> *Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son."* Genesis 22:8a

<sup>22</sup> *But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.* Galatians 3:22 In clarifying to Israel what was expected of them, God made them even more accountable for disobedience. But on the other hand, the pictures presented by the worship rituals of the law and its

declarations all pointed to God's provision of a Savior. Moses even clearly predicted His coming in Deuteronomy 18:15<sup>xxxix</sup>. This imprisonment under sin applies to all who know the law but cannot keep it. Old Testament saints by faith looked forward to the promise of the coming Messiah and were saved. That was made possible when Jesus fulfilled the promise. They were included in the blessing from Abraham's Seed.

God did provide the true sacrifice that would take away sin, just as Abraham declared to Isaac. Jesus went up the same mountain that Abraham and Isaac climbed (Genesis 22:2<sup>xxxix</sup>; 2 Chronicles 3:1<sup>xxxix</sup>). Like Isaac He carried the wood of His sacrifice, and He too believed that God would raise Him (Genesis 22:6<sup>xxxix</sup>). This time, God allowed man to go through with it, for our sake. And God did raise Jesus from among the dead as proof that the sacrifice was accepted and that His Word is sure.

Do you see the connection with descendants of Abraham's faith and the belief in resurrection? The promise to bless the world was fulfilled. By faith we take hold of the blessing just as Abraham did and have the promise of everlasting life (John 3:36<sup>xxxix</sup>). We believe and it is counted to us as righteousness because Jesus received the penalty for our sins (2 Corinthians 5:21<sup>xxxix</sup>).

We believe God's promise just as Abraham did, only we don't see it as physical descendants, but as spiritual descendants who have the same faith as Abraham. We, like Abraham, believe in resurrection, the resurrection of Jesus. That is one reason Jesus had to rise from the dead, to show that the faith of Abraham and that of all who believe which will result in the conquest of death (Romans 6:5<sup>xxxix</sup>). It showed Abraham's faith was not misplaced, nor is ours. That is why when Paul saw the resurrected Christ, he had to go back to the Scriptures and see what he missed. Abraham believed in resurrection and then Paul did too. Seeing the resurrected Christ caused him to go back in his mind to Mount Moriah and connect the promises to Abraham to what had taken place on Mount Moriah just a few years before: the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. The Descendant who came to bless the world was the very One he was persecuting, and resurrection was the proof of it. The promise came before the law and is the fulfillment of the law.

God's plan of saving mankind has never changed. Paul summed it up so succinctly in his letter to the Ephesians. <sup>8</sup> *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* Ephesians 2:8-9 The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin; Jesus paid the penalty we deserved; the Father accepts that as justice met and counts our belief as righteousness. Then the Holy Spirit begins to transform us from the inside out. Praise God!

*To Him who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to Him be the glory forever and ever. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen!*

Questions:

- 1 Why should we make the Bible our life's study?
- 2 Why did Paul bring up the fact that a ratified covenant can't be changed?
- 3 How does the targum translate the promise to Abraham?
- 4 How does that fit with the Isaiah 53 prophecy?
- 5 Can a later law nullify a previous unconditional promise of God?
- 6 What are the main differences between the Abraham and Moses covenants?
- 7 Why did we need the laws of Moses?

- 8 What part should still be applicable to us today?  
9 What is verse 20 referring to?  
10 How does the law point to a coming Messiah?

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<sup>i</sup> **Psalm 119:72 (ESV)**

<sup>72</sup> The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces.

<sup>ii</sup> **2 Corinthians 4:18 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

<sup>iii</sup> **Galatians 1:17-18 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. <sup>18</sup> Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days.

<sup>iv</sup> **1 Corinthians 2:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

<sup>v</sup> **Genesis 3:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

<sup>vi</sup> **Isaiah 49:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> he says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

<sup>vii</sup> **Isaiah 9:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

<sup>viii</sup> **Genesis 22:18 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."

<sup>ix</sup> **Genesis 15:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

<sup>x</sup> **Hebrews 11:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

<sup>xi</sup> **Romans 10:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

<sup>xii</sup> **Leviticus 18:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD.

<sup>xiii</sup> **1 Peter 2:22 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.

<sup>xiv</sup> **James 2:22 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works;

<sup>xv</sup> **John 16:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment:

<sup>xvi</sup> **John 1:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

<sup>xvii</sup> **Joshua 24:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve,

<sup>xviii</sup> **Exodus 31:18 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> And he gave to Moses, when he had finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.

<sup>xix</sup> **Psalm 40:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> In sacrifice and offering you have not delighted, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required.

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<sup>xx</sup> **Exodus 20:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> “You shall have no other gods before me.

<sup>xxi</sup> **Exodus 20:13-16 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> “You shall not murder. <sup>14</sup> “You shall not commit adultery. <sup>15</sup> “You shall not steal. <sup>16</sup> “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

<sup>xxii</sup> **Mark 10:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.’”

<sup>xxiii</sup> **1 Peter 2:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

<sup>xxiv</sup> **Romans 3:23 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

<sup>xxv</sup> **Acts 7:53 (ESV)**

<sup>53</sup> you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.”

<sup>xxvi</sup> **Hebrews 2:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution,

<sup>xxvii</sup> **Exodus 31:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> “You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, ‘Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you.

<sup>xxviii</sup> **Psalms 14:1-3 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good. <sup>2</sup> The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. <sup>3</sup> They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.

<sup>xxix</sup> **Proverbs 20:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> Who can say, “I have made my heart pure; I am clean from my sin”?

<sup>xxx</sup> **Romans 11:32 (ESV)**

<sup>32</sup> For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.

<sup>xxxi</sup> **Deuteronomy 18:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—

<sup>xxxii</sup> **Genesis 22:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> He said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.”

<sup>xxxiii</sup> **2 Chronicles 3:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Then Solomon began to build the house of the LORD in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the LORD had appeared to David his father, at the place that David had appointed, on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> **Genesis 22:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together.

<sup>xxxv</sup> **John 3:36 (ESV)**

<sup>36</sup> Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> **2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> **Romans 6:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.