

Studies in Galatians (9/22)

The Promise and Its Surety.*Galatians 3:15-18*

We closed our study last week with the fourteenth verse of the third chapter, the last words being concerning "the promise of the Spirit." Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, in order that the blessing of Abraham might come on us, Gentiles, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. It is clear, as shown in the last study, that the receiving of the promise of the Spirit through faith, refers not simply to the receiving of the Spirit, and much less to the receiving of the promises that we shall at some time have the Spirit, but to the receiving of that of which the presence of the Spirit is a pledge. From Eph. 1:13, 14 we learned that the Spirit is a pledge, the first-fruits of an inheritance that has been purchased for us. In our study this week we have to do with that promised inheritance. And first we will read the portion of the text that outlines it.

The Lesson for the Week

"Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Tho it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto. Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise." Gal. 3:15-18.

Before beginning our study, it may be well to state that we shall not try to treat of the whole of this portion of Scripture this week, so that if there are some things left untouched, the reader will not feel disappointed. There is so close connection between all the statements in this chapter that it is difficult to select out any special verses for study. All the verses just quoted are necessary to the subject before us this week, yet they must also be considered in connection with the verses that will come in our next week's study.

The Promise Was Made to Abraham.—It will be seen that Abraham is the one about whom this chapter centers. He is the one to whom the Gospel of world-wide salvation was preached. He believed, and received the blessing, even the blessing of righteousness. All who believe are blessed with believing Abraham. They who are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. Christ hath redeemed us from the curse, in order that the blessing of Abraham might come on us. "To Abraham and his seed were the promises made." "If the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise." Thus it is

clear that the promise to us is the promise that was made to Abraham, and in which we share as his children.

The Promise Concerns an Inheritance.—This is evident from verse 18: “If the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise.” This agrees with what has been already been noted in Eph. 1:13, 14, that the Spirit is the pledge of a possession that has been purchased. “The promise of the Spirit” is therefore an inheritance. That is, the Spirit not only promises us an inheritance, but the possession of the Spirit is the surety of the inheritance. When, therefore, we read that Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith, we can see that it is the same as saying that Christ hath redeemed us from the curse, in order that we might receive an inheritance. And so we read in Heb. 9:14, 15 that Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, will purge our conscience from dead works to serve the living God; because “He is the Mediator of the new covenant, that by means of death, for the remission of transgression under the first covenant, they which are called might receive *the promise of eternal inheritance.*”

What the Eternal Inheritance Is.—The last words of the preceding paragraph set us on the track of the answer to this. It is an “eternal inheritance.” This of course follows from the fact that Christ has redeemed us from the curse in order that we might receive this inheritance; for the curse is death, and whatever we receive as the consequence of being saved from death, must be eternal. But we must turn to the direct record of the promise to Abraham, and there we shall find the matter clearly stated. The promise is many times repeated, but in order to save time we shall take only one statement of it. In Gen. 17:7, 8 we read these words of God to Abraham:—

“I will establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.”

The Whole World

Here we see most clearly that the promised inheritance is land—the land of Canaan. But, let it be borne in mind, it is an “everlasting possession.” Abraham himself, as well as his seed, possess it to eternity. Therefore the possession of the land of Canaan, according to the promise to Abraham, involves the possession of everlasting life in which to enjoy it; but immortality is bestowed only at the coming of Christ and the resurrection. This Abraham well understood; for even while he was in the land of Canaan, he sojourned in it as in a strange country, desiring and looking for “a better country, that is an heavenly” (Heb.

11:9-16); and the fact that he "died in faith, not having received the promises" shows that he knew that he was to receive it at the resurrection.

But when the land of Canaan is thus given to Abraham for an everlasting possession, the restoration of all things will take place (Acts 3:20, 21), so that the possession of the land of Canaan will be in reality the possession of the whole earth. So Paul, speaking with direct reference to the record in the seventeenth of Genesis, says: "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.

Therefore we, "according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." 2 Peter 3:13. This is the promised inheritance, the possession of which is assured to us by the Spirit.

An Inheritance without a Curse.—"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse; . . . that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." This "promise of the Spirit" we have seen to be the possession of the whole earth made new—redeemed from the curse; for "the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." The earth, fresh and new from the hand of God, perfect in every respect, was given to man for a possession. Gen. 1:27, 28, 31. Man sinned and brought the curse upon himself. Christ has taken the whole curse, both of man and of all creation, on Himself. He redeems the earth from the curse, that it may be the everlasting possession that God originally designed it to be; and He also redeems man from the curse, that he may be fitted for the possession of such an inheritance. And this, let it be noted, is the sum of the Gospel. The whole Gospel has reference to this, and to this alone. Man redeemed, but with no place to live in, would present an incomplete work. While the cross of Christ is the sole agent of redemption, yet "Christ crucified" would be nothing if it did not include Christ risen. But Christ risen means Christ risen to the right hand of the Majesty on high; and this means: "To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne." Rev. 3:21. Without this "blessed hope" our faith would be vain, and we should yet be in our sins; for the power by which we are redeemed is the power by which the new heavens and the new earth are made. Their freedom from the curse guarantees our freedom from the curse, for God created the earth not in vain, but formed it to be inhabited, and "some must enter therein." Then will be an earth without any curse, inhabited by people wholly freed from the curse of sin and death. "And there shall be no more curse." Rev. 22:3.

The Covenants of Promise.—That the covenant and promise of God are one and the same thing, is clearly seen from Gal. 3:17, where it appears that the disannulling the covenant would be the making void the promise. In Gen. 17 we read that God made a covenant with

Abraham, to give him the land of Canaan—the whole world—for an everlasting possession; but Gal. 3:18 says that God gave it to him *by promise*. God's covenants with men can be nothing else than promises to them: for "who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?" Rom. 11:35. God does not make bargains with men, because He well knows that man could not fulfill his part. Knowing that man is "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:17), God counsels him to buy of Him everything that is needed, but to buy "without money, and without price." In short, God promises man everything he needs, and more than we can ask or think, as a gift. We give Him ourselves, that is, nothing, and He gives us Himself, that is, everything. That which makes all the trouble is that even when men are willing to recognize the Lord at all, they want to make bargains with Him. They want it to be a "mutual" affair,—a transaction in which they will be considered as on a par with God. But whoever deals with God must deal with Him on His own terms, that is, on a basis of fact—that we have nothing, and He has everything and is everything.

The Covenant Confirmed.—The covenant, that is, the promise of God to give men the whole earth made new, after having made them free from the curse, was "confirmed before of God in Christ." He is the surety of the new covenant, even the everlasting covenant. "For how many soever be the promises of God, in Him is the yea; wherefore also through Him is the Amen, unto the glory of God through us." 2 Cor. 1:20, R.V. In Him we have obtained the inheritance (Eph. 1:11), for the Holy Spirit is the first-fruits of the inheritance, and the possession of the Holy Spirit is Christ Himself dwelling in the heart by faith.

Confirmed by an Oath of God.

"When God made promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no greater, He sware by Himself; . . . for men verily swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath; that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us; which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." Heb. 6:13-20.

It was the oath of God, therefore, that confirmed the covenant made to Abraham; that promise and oath to Abraham are our ground of hope, our strong consolation; but it is "sure and steadfast," because the oath sets forth Christ as the pledge, the surety, and "He ever liveth,"—the covenant is confirmed in Him, and no one can disannul it or add anything to it. That is to say, the Gospel to-day is precisely the same in every particular that it was in the days of Abraham. It is summed up in this: God will give to men "the first dominion," the earth free from all curse; the promise is to all without exception, and the fulfillment is to all

who believe in Christ, "in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins." Just as the earth was given to Adam in the beginning, without his having done anything to earn it, even so the new earth is a free gift,—the inheritance is solely by promise; but this inheritance is an inheritance of righteousness, and this necessary righteousness God gives to us, creating us new creatures in Christ, even as in the beginning. He created Adam a perfect man. And all this is assured to us by the oath of God, in which He pledged His own existence. But this oath was in Christ crucified, and the cross of Christ, bearing the curse everywhere, is the assurance that God in Christ ever liveth.

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