

6. The Priority of the Promise (4Q 2011—Galatians)

Biblical material: Gal. 3:15–20, Gen. 9:11–17, Matt. 5:17–20, Exod. 16:22–26, Gen. 15:1–6.

Quotes

- For every promise, there is price to pay. *Jim Rohn*
- God never made a promise that was too good to be true. *Dwight L. Moody*
- The future is plump with promise. *Maya Angelou*
- Our Lord has written the promise of resurrection, not in books alone, but in every leaf in springtime. *Martin Luther*
- Those who promise us paradise on earth never produced anything but a hell. *Karl Popper*
- The promises of God are as good as ready money any day. *Billy Bray*
- My future is as bright as the promises of God. *Adoniram Judson*

Questions

What has God's promise got to do with his law? How does God really want to relate to us? So what is the purpose of the Law? How does Paul's explanation help not just his situation with the Galatians but also us today? How does this all fit into the great controversy perspective and our role in this conflict?

Bible summary

Gal. 3:15–20: Here Paul adds to the previous argument regarding Abraham, pointing out that the Law came *after* the promise, so if salvation really was a matter of law-keeping, then this at the least should have been given at the same time of the promise. He also points to the whole idea of contract or agreement—something that cannot be changed later. So the promise was not modified by the Law that came 430 years afterwards. It should not be taken from this that Paul is trying to develop a theology of contractual obligation rather than the promise was a solemn statement of intent that is not modified by later law-giving.

Gen. 9:11–17 is the promise made to Noah, stated in terms of a covenant. In Matt. 5:17–20 Jesus makes it abundantly clear that he has not come to do away with the Law of Moses or the teachings of the prophets—but he has come to fulfill them. Exod. 16:22–26 details the story of the manna, and the instructions as to its collection and use—as an example of God's promises. Gen. 15:1–6 is God's promise to Abraham that he will have a son, and many descendants through him

Comment

Here in Galatians 3 Paul is explaining that the promise takes priority over the law—that even chronologically it cannot be seen as taking precedence. He is also making the case that a promise from God is so much better than any keeping of the rules, and that God wants to be in that promise relationship with us.

Then in verse 19 comes the clincher. He plainly states that the purpose of the Law is as something *added*—it does not in any way *replace* what has gone before. This is to directly attack those who insisted that the Gentile believers *must* keep all the ceremonial

Law. The Law is added “because of transgression”—meaning that it is given because there is a problem with knowing right and wrong. Laws are given in a particular situation to deal with a specific problem. Here then is the reason for the Law given to and through Moses. Even so this is a temporary expedient, as Paul also makes clear: “it [the Law] was meant to last until the coming of Abraham’s descendant, to whom the promise was made. The Law was handed down by angels, with a man acting as a go-between. But a go-between is not needed when only one person is involved; and God is one.” (Gal. 3:19b-20 TEV). In other words, once Christ came God is revealed as he truly is, and the Law is no longer necessary as an explanation of God, for God is with us in person.

Paul is really saying that trusting the God of Promise is so much better than understanding God as being preoccupied with legal record-keeping—making sure everyone has complied with the requirements. The Law is still useful in showing us what is right, but it doesn’t take us any further. Only as we enter into a relationship with the God of Promise do we find his healing salvation and eternal comfort in his loving arms.

This is the promise of the God who comes to us. Ever since the Lord God came to talk with the man and the woman in the garden, God has been coming to us. So much of what we understand about God is expressed in this idea of his coming to meet with us. God came to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and spoke with them. Moses met with the God that came in the experience of the burning bush, and at Sinai. The whole record of the experience of Israel was one of an active God who went with them, participating in all their history. God came and was visibly present in the Exodus, a fact that was repeated again and again to encourage Israel in later times. The coming God is a theme that runs through the whole of the Old Testament, right up to the last verse (Malachi 4:6). The God of Israel comes, he comes to reward, to judge, to complete his work. He comes to help, to correct, but above all he comes to save.

This same promise is behind the mission of Jesus. In expressing so many of his deeper teachings, Jesus says that he came in the fulfilment of God’s promise to save: “the Son of man came to seek and to save what was lost” (Lk.19:10NIV); “the Son of man came, not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mt.10:45); “the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them”(Lk.9:56). Jesus came for a purpose: “I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me” (Jn.6:38). He “came unto his own, and his own received him not” (Jn.1:11), a coming not in terms of the terrible judgement of God, but to save us. (Jn.12:47). At the heart of the message of God’s love in Jesus is that the Son of God came to us, to show us himself so that he might save us.

Ellen White Comments

The Jews had misinterpreted God’s promise of eternal favor to Israel... The Jews regarded their natural descent from Abraham as giving them a claim to this promise... To a people in whose hearts His law is written, the favor of God is assured. They are one with Him. But the Jews had separated themselves from God... {DA 106}

Every time a soul is converted, and learns to love God and keep His commandments, the promise of God is fulfilled, “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you.” Ezek. 36:26. The change in human hearts, the transformation of human characters, is a miracle that reveals an ever-living Saviour, working to rescue souls. {DA 407}

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