

Paul viewed the Gentiles coming to faith in Christ as both his mandate from the Lord and his own heartbeat in ministry (cf. Acts 9:1-15, 14:8-23, 22:1-21, 26:1-20; ref. also 1 Corinthians 9:14-23; Galatians 4:1-20; etc.). Furthermore, to separate faith and obedience so as to speak of obedience *except as a fruit of faith* is to misunderstand its very nature and its place in relation to the gospel and the Christian life.

But because faith does have its fruit, it is also appropriate to speak of an obedience that has its source and subject in faith, which ideas are expressed by the first two interpretations. By seeing the relative validity of all three interpretations the overall thrust of the context and the flexibility and nuanced character of the grammar are properly recognized. More importantly, the biblical relation between obedience and faith is maintained.

- 2) With respect to this obedience of faith Paul was explicit that it pertains specifically to the *Gentiles* (1:5, 16:26). The reason for making this distinction was not that the Jewish people have no share in the gospel and its salvation. Neither was he identifying a new Gentile “dispensation” by which the prophets’ promises to Israel were to be put on hold for a future fulfillment in a millennial kingdom as maintained by Dispensationalism. Rather, Paul’s statements were again expressive of his redemptive-historical perspective. Which is to say:

*One of the most important and conspicuous transitions that marked the end of the old aeon of the flesh and the coming of the new aeon of the kingdom was the “globalizing” of the covenant category of the “people of God.”*

Under the old aeon, the “seed of Abraham” to whom the Abrahamic promises pertained was constrained to his physical offspring through Isaac and Jacob. Accordingly, when God sent Moses to bring Jacob’s descendents out of their bondage in Egypt and lead them into the land of Canaan, He specifically stated that His intention in doing so was to fulfill His covenant promises to Abraham, his son, and his grandson (cf. Genesis 12:1-3, 13:14-17, 15:1-21, 26:1-5, 23-25, 28:10-15; Exodus 3:1-10, 6:2-8; etc.). Covenant Israel represented the fulfillment of the divine promise to bring forth from Abraham a great nation consecrated to the Lord as Abraham himself had been. Thus Israel was rightly called God’s elect and beloved son, a holy nation, and a kingdom of priests (Exodus 4:21-23, 19:1-6; Deuteronomy 7:1-8).

But with the New Covenant in Christ’s blood and the advent of the new aeon of the Spirit, the identity of God’s covenant people changed, and that not by way of replacement, but promised *fulfillment* (Ephesians 2:11ff).

Previously the elect, consecrated covenant community of God had been represented typologically in Israel as the *physical* seed of Abraham, but now it has found its expression in the antitype that is Abraham's *spiritual* seed. The identity of the covenant people of God was no longer defined by physical ancestry, but spiritual union. That is, in the fulfillment of the "fullness of the times" God revealed that Jesus Christ is the true Seed of Abraham to whom His promises to Abraham pertained. This is so because the Abrahamic promise of *righteousness by faith* depended upon the *mediation* of righteousness by his singular, righteous Seed. Without that mediation the promise could never be realized. As a result, all those who are joined to Christ constitute Abraham's true offspring and, therefore, heirs of the promises made to him (Galatians 3:1-29; ref. also Romans 2:28-29, 9:1-8, 10:1-11:24). Although made explicit in New Covenant fulfillment, the fact that the Abrahamic promise extended beyond the nation of Israel is implied even by the promise itself (cf. Genesis 12:3 and Galatians 3:8; also Genesis 17:1-7).

In the end, the typological fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham that came through the establishing of the covenant nation of Israel only provided further prophetic content in the advance of redemptive history. This is the character of revelation in its progress through time: *Revelation always builds upon itself, so that typological entities - which each arise at a given point in history - presuppose their predecessors and also provide a foundation for those that follow. In this way biblical types contribute to one another and all other species of prophecy in the forward movement of redemptive history as together they construct a full portrait of God's work of redemption and the Redeemer appointed to accomplish it.*

So also national Israel, as a type of the true redeemed, covenant community, served to prefigure and anticipate the redeemed congregation that is the Church of Jesus Christ.

- This is why Peter could, without apology or explanation, freely apply the terminology of Israel's covenant status to those who comprise the New Covenant community of the Church (1 Peter 2:1-10, esp. vv. 9-10).
- For the same reason the New Testament uses the language of Israel's history and theocratic life when speaking of Christ's Church (Romans 12:1; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; Colossians 2:11-12; Hebrews 3:5-11, 9:1-14, 12:18-24, 13:9-15; etc.). This is especially true in John's visions in the Revelation (5:1-10, 7:9-17, 21:12-23, 22:1-15). It is also the pattern of Jesus' own kingdom teaching: the patriarchal promises are extended to the Gentiles (Luke 13:22-30), as are God's covenant provision and care (John 3:13-17, 6:22-40, 7:37-39, 10:1-16, etc.).

Central to Paul's apostolic proclamation was his insistence that the inauguration of the aeon of the Spirit brought with it the unveiling of the *mystery* of the gospel promised beforehand in the Scriptures. This truth not only bookends the Roman epistle, it is a fundamental theme throughout Paul's letters. And at the heart of that mystery is the doctrine of the *Church*, namely that in union with Christ "*the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel*" (Ephesians 2:11-3:10; note also Romans 9:22-33; Galatians 3:1-29, especially vv. 23-29; Colossians 1:24-29; and 1 Timothy 3:14-16). Like his fellow apostles and His Lord, Paul, too, saw the Church as the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise.

As has been seen, from the time of the calling of Abraham some two-thousand years earlier, the biblical category of Yahweh's *covenant people* had pertained exclusively to one branch of Abraham's physical descendants and the relatively few Gentiles joined to that community by personal participation in the Israelite covenant religion and rituals. At the same time, these Gentile converts to Judaism still retained a real distinction from the "seed of Abraham."

Similarly, Israel's prophets spoke of the coming of the kingdom as embracing the nations of the earth, but they always retained a sense of the Jew/Gentile distinction (cf. Isaiah 19:18-25, 49:1-7; Amos 9:11-15). The reason for this is the historical/cultural context in which they prophesied. For despite the ever-present reality of Gentile converts to Judaism, the concept of the covenant community - the people of Yahweh - was viewed in terms of the Israelite theocracy.

*Therefore, the idea of a single, global, covenant community free of all ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and/or geographical parameters was entirely unknown; this is the mystery of the Church whose revelation awaited the fullness of times, and whose present unveiling Paul labored to proclaim.*

- 3) And finally, as Paul's receipt of grace and apostleship was unto the obedience of faith among the Gentiles, so it was ultimately *for Christ's name sake*. The Son of God had come into the world to give Himself as an offering for sin in order to "condemn sin in sinful man" (Romans 8:3), and thereby "draw all men to Himself" (John 12:31-32). This drawing of men was for the purpose of gathering in His sheep, so that He would lose none of all that His Father had given to Him (John 6:35-40). For the Father had promised Him a kingdom as His conquering Servant and Redeemer - a kingdom comprised of all those redeemed by His blood and renewed by His Spirit. As the eternal counsel of the Father's will is the final summing up of all things in His Son, so all things have reference to Him, whether in justification or condemnation, destruction or renewal, even as all authority and dominion belong to Him (Ephesians 1:18-23; Colossians 1:15-20).