

13 Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that hangeth on a tree: 14 That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. 15 Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though *it be* but a man's covenant, yet *if it be* confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto. 16 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. 17 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. 18 For if the inheritance *be* of the law, *it is* no more of promise: but God gave *it* to Abraham by promise.

What a great passage this is! I would see three things to unpack this great passage for the joy and comfort of God's people. The nature of the promise; the nature of the Inheritance; the Life.

- I. God gave a promise to Abraham. There are three words in English that overlap and help explain the meaning. The words are promise, covenant, and testament.
 - a. The word covenant contains a promise, and in covenant there are mutual responsibilities implied. Testament implies promise also, but the emphasis is upon the will of the one who make the last will and testament, although it may also impose a duty upon the one who receives the inheritance. There is some ambiguity because the same word in the Greek New Testament could mean both covenant and testament.
 - b. A Last Will and Testament certainly is a covenant of sorts, and both Covenant and Last Will and Testament have the idea of inheritance. The writer of Hebrews certainly uses the word in the Last Will and Testament sense in chapter 9, because he says that such a document is not in force until the death of the testator, which would not be true of covenants. It is complicated by the fact, however, that in Old Testament Covenants, blood was shed—not, however, of the parties, but of animals. Hence, covenants were said to be “cut.” This is a very rich study, which is beyond the reach of a sermon such as this.
 - c. Paul certainly includes the idea of Last Will and Testament here, because he speaks of an inheritance, but I have no problem with the word covenant, provided, of course, that it be broadened from the common meaning in the English.
 - d. What does Paul include in the Promise:
 - i. Blessing: opposed to the curse of the law.
 - ii. Spiritual things “Promise of the Spirit”
 - iii. Life and Righteousness: verse 21
 - iv. Faith of Jesus Christ: vs. 22
- II. Inheritance: Or more properly: Who was to receive this inheritance?
 - a. Christ alone: vs. 16. A profound argument. “Seed” is a collective noun. Paul knew that Moses did not need to write “seeds” to include all the children of Abraham, but he is making a very important argument here.

- b. Abraham’s “seed” inherits. Paul unpacks Galatians 3:16 in the famous passage in Romans 9. Not all of Abraham’s seed are Abraham’s seed. Ishmael wasn’t; nor the descendants of the six sons that Abraham had by Keturah, whom he married after the death of Sarah.
- c. But if you narrow the seed to Isaac, not even all of Isaac’s children were included in the promised “seed,” but Esau was rejected and Jacob blessed of God. This was according to the election of God, and had nothing to do with their works—and this is according to the plain teaching of the Apostle Paul in Romans 9.
- d. But not only that, not even all Israel [Jacob] is Israel, and Paul summarizes his argument in Romans 9 by quoting Isaiah and saying that though Israel was as the sand of the sea, a remnant would be saved; and that unless God had left a remnant Israel would have been as Sodom and Gomorrah—utterly destroyed and cursed.
- e. What is Paul’s point in both Galatians 3:16 and in Romans 9, but to say that the inheritance promised to Abraham was in Christ and in Christ alone? When the people of God in all ages are gathered together in Christ, they become a “people,” a seed that inherits the promises that we spoke of above. This inheritance is by election and through Jesus Christ: this, we believe, is Paul’s meaning.
- f. You and I are Abraham’s seed, if we are in Christ, and this is the way that Paul summarizes it in Galatians 3:29: “If And if ye *be* Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.” This is Paul’s meaning: Those who are united to Christ by faith, receive the promises that Abraham received by faith.
- g. There were other things included in God’s blessing to Abraham, such as a numerous posterity, kings coming out of him, the land, etc., but these were of a temporal nature, and have already been fulfilled.

III. Life: I want you to focus on verse 21.

- a. Paul contrasts the promise of the law with the promise of Abraham. His very point is how the law could not annul what God had promised to Abraham. He says that the law could not bring life and righteousness; hence, the promise to Abraham must have included life and righteousness. The law could not annul the promise to Abraham—it could not bring life and righteousness; if God’s promise to Abraham did not include life and righteousness, then Paul is speaking gibberish. It would be like a suitor for a lady’s hand saying, “You should marry me, because that other guy cannot give you diamonds.” If I can’t give you diamonds either, then what is the point? The clear implication of verse 21 is that Abraham received life and righteousness by faith.
- b. What is meant by “life”? It cannot mean physical life, because Abraham died and was buried in the cave at Machpelah. A literal translation would be “if a law could have been given which could make alive...”
- c. This seals Paul argument. “How were you made alive?” by keeping commandments, or by faith in Christ.

- d. This life is defined Ephesians 2:1-3 It means life in God, the opposite of dead in trespasses and in sins.
- 1 And you *hath he quickened*, who were dead in trespasses and sins;
 - 2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:
 - 3 Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.
- e. This was a constant theme in the ministry of Christ:
- John 1:4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men
- John 3:15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.
- John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.
- John 3:36 He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.
- John 4:14 But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.
- John 5:24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.
- John 5:39 Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.
- John 5:40 And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.
- John 6:27 Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.
- John 6:35 And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.
- John 6:40 And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.
- John 6:47 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.
- John 6:51 I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.
- John 6:53 Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.

- John 6:54 Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.
- John 6:63 It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, *they* are spirit, and *they* are life.
- John 6:68 Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.
- John 10:10 The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have *it* more abundantly.
- John 10:28 And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand.
- John 11:25 Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:

Because Christ has removed the curse through the shedding of his blood, all those who believe in him have passed from death into life—we have been quickened to newness of life—to love and joy and peace with God, so that the former life of death and misery has passed away, and we have begun on a new life in Jesus Christ.

The Heidelberg Catechism puts it this way:

Q90: What is the making alive of the new man?

A90: Heartfelt joy in God through Christ,[1] causing us to take delight in living according to the will of God in all good works.[2]

Paul’s point is that this new life in Christ cannot come from the works of the law, but by faith in Christ. This is what Abraham received.

May God bless you.