

• *The gospel clearly stated*

Paul reminded the apostle Peter that justification is by faith in the faithfulness of Christ. <sup>☐1</sup> It is proved by the story of Abraham the model believer. <sup>☐2</sup> Abraham is the model of how a person becomes righteousness in the sight of God. It is purely and exclusively a matter of faith in the promises of God. This is the gospel and it was stated clearly even as far back as the days of Abraham.

<sup>☐1</sup> 2:15-16  
<sup>☐2</sup> 3:6-14

**Covenants are fixed and firm**

Now Paul adds a new point. Nothing that happened later in the story of the promise about Jesus could possibly cancel out what happened in the case of Abraham. God's relationship with Abraham was part of a covenant. Covenants once fixed cannot be changed. It is a basic principle in 'covenants'. *'Brothers and sisters, let me give an ordinary human example. Although it may be only a human covenant, once it has been fixed no one sets it aside or adds anything to it once'*. <sup>☐1</sup> A 'covenant' is a legal contract. Various terms and conditions and promises are involved. Historically, an oath had to be taken by one party or perhaps by both parties. It was the oath that fixed the covenant. It was like the signature on a modern agreement. Once the document is signed the matter is fixed and settled and generally cannot be changed. It was the same with ancient covenants. Once that oath had been taken the covenant was fixed and firm. It was not meant to be changed in any way.

<sup>☐1</sup> :15

**God and Abraham**

- *Grace*
- *Promise*
- *Covering righteousness*
- *Faith*

All of this applied in the relationship between God and Abraham. Think of the story. (i) It began in grace. Abraham was a moon-worshipper but God stepped into his life to save him and use him. (ii) It involved promises about 'a seed', and 'the seed' turned out to be the Lord Jesus Christ. (iii) Abraham was righteous before God by his faith in God's promises. He had many weaknesses, but he also had a covering righteousness; the righteousness of God was reckoned as his. (iv) Abraham's justifying righteousness was given to him through his faith.

• *Inheritance*

But there was more. (v) God promised Abraham an inheritance. There were various gifts and blessings (fame, land, worldwide influence, and so on) that God wanted to give him.

• *Covenant*

(vi) These promises became part of a covenant. God proposed to 'swear on oath' that these promises would be fulfilled.

• *Faith and Patience*

(vii) Before the covenant-oath could be given, Abraham had to persist in faith. It was by faith **and patience** that Abraham would inherit the promises. He was 'justified', but the inheritance was yet to come. (viii) Before the covenant-oath would be given, Abraham was asked to walk before God and be perfect. <sup>☐1</sup> There was one particular command given to him (concerning circumcision) and he had to obey it. (ix) Before the covenant-oath was given by God, Abraham's obedience was tested. <sup>☐2</sup>

<sup>☐1</sup> Genesis 17:1

<sup>☐2</sup> Genesis 22:1

• *Particular command*

• *Obedience tested*

• *Covenant fixed*

In Genesis 22:16–18 God's oath was given. Once the oath was given the covenant was secure. It was unchangeably fixed and certain that Jesus would come as the 'seed of Abraham' from the point of Genesis 22:16 onwards.

**Abraham's story is an early form of the gospel**

Paul's point is that all of this is in fact an early form of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. (i) We are saved by sheer grace. In the midst of our sin God steps into our lives. (ii) He gives promises of salvation and His promises all revolve around our Lord Jesus Christ. (iii) We become righteous before God. (iv) This 'justification' is by faith in Jesus – and by nothing but faith. (v) God promises inheritance to us, the particular things He wants to give us, the particular ways He wants to use us. (vi) These promises are part of a covenant – the new covenant through Jesus. God wants us to inherit these promises. He wants to give them to us on oath.

(vii) Before the covenant-oath can be given we must persist in faith. (viii) We are asked to walk before God and be perfect. (ix) Before the covenant-oath will be given our obedience is likely to be tested.

• **The seed**

The gospel is in the story of Abraham. The 'seed' to be born was supremely the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul says, *'Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his seed. It does not say, "and to seeds", referring to many people, but "And to your seed", referring to one person. That one person is Christ.'* <sup>1</sup> The promise Abraham was trusting was a promise about Jesus!

<sup>1</sup> 3:16

**The way of salvation is fixed and settled**

Now we come to the heart of what Paul wants to say: The way of salvation was fixed and settled when God swore an oath to Abraham. Nothing can change in a covenant once it has been 'ratified' by the taking of the oath. So, **anything that happened later in the story of God-and-Israel cannot possibly change the gospel that was given to Abraham.** What Paul has in mind is the Mosaic law. Whatever the Mosaic law might be, it cannot change the gospel. The gospel was given to Abraham before the law existed. *'What I mean is this. The law, which came four hundred and thirty years afterward, does not set aside a covenant which was previously fixed by God, in order to destroy the promise'* (3:17). When God gave the gospel to Abraham, it was simply a promise about Jesus. It had to be believed. When God gave the law to Israel He was not abolishing the gospel or changing the gospel. He was not giving a law-method of salvation so as to abolish the faith-in-a-promise way of salvation.

<sup>1</sup> 3:17

• **The Mosaic law cannot change the gospel**

• **Abraham did not do any Mosaic law keeping**

*'For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.'* <sup>1</sup> Abraham did not get to the glorious day when he received the promises by obedience to the hundreds of regulations in the Mosaic law. He simply believed and believed and believed yet again, no matter how slow the promise was in coming, no matter how many difficulties and obstacles had to be faced, no matter how much he discovered his own weakness. And by faith and patience he inherited the promises. This is Paul's point. Law-keeping must not be allowed to abolish the gospel. Abraham is the model believer and he did not do any Mosaic law-keeping. The law was centuries ahead.

<sup>1</sup> 3:18

**Our relationship to the law**

• **We are not under the law**

• **The law is fulfilled by the coming of Jesus and our walking in the Spirit**

Of course, all of this leads to the question: why then was the law given? That is Paul's next point in Galatians 3:19! But one thing is sure. The Mosaic law cannot abolish the way we are meant to live as children of Abraham. The gospel way of persistent faith until all of God's promises are inherited must not be squeezed out by Mosaic law-keeping. The law was something different altogether, and it was only temporary. We are not under it. We do not relate to God through it. We are like Abraham. We relate to God directly and we persist in faith, until we inherit the promises. The Mosaic law does not come into the matter at all. It is fulfilled by the coming of Jesus and by our walking in the Holy Spirit.



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