

The New Covenant

By Elder Gregg Thompson

“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;” -- Galatians 3:15.

Some have said that Paul was a novice in Christianity when he wrote this epistle, and the Judaizing teachers of his day labored to persuade the Galatians that he was inferior to the other apostles, and particularly to Peter, James, and John, whose followers they pretended to be, and like their Judaizing brethren at Antioch, taught that, *“Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye can not be saved;”* Acts 15:1. Thus they mixed up the two covenants, and made the justification and salvation of the sinner depend upon his own works; and by their sophistries and appeals to the natural feeling which always favors a conditional salvation and lays the ground for boasting, for whatever depends upon works does not exclude boasting, they succeeded in alienating the hearts of the brethren from Paul, and to regard him as their enemy.

The design of this epistle is to vindicate the genuineness of his apostleship, that it was “not of men, neither by men; but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him up from the dead;” and that the gospel he preached he had not received of men, neither was he taught it by men, but by revelation of Jesus Christ. Here Paul teaches that God specially calls men to the work of the ministry, and specially qualifies them to do the work he calls them to; that none have the right to enter this holy vocation, but those who are called of God, as was Aaron; that all schools and colleges gotten up to prepare men for the gospel ministry are assumptions upon the part of men, and have in all ages been the nursery of error, making the gospel of Jesus Christ nothing but a humanly devised system that can be taught as a worldly science may be taught. Against this Paul enters his

protest, as have the Primitive Baptists of all ages, and those college-made preachers have no right to claim identity with the apostolic church.

The apostle then speaks of his faithfulness as a called servant of God to preach Jesus and the resurrection among them; and that freedom from the law and its curse came alone through Christ who was made a curse for us; that righteousness could never come by the works of the law; and that no man could ever be justified by the deeds of the law; for he says, "Therefore by the deeds of the law, there shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin." And again he says, "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified;" Galatians 2:16. And as a final and unanswerable argument, he tells us, "If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law." Thus the apostle shows that all who preach a conditional salvation, or that justification is by the works of the law, destroy the doctrine of grace; for any thing obtained by works is not of grace; for, if "the reward is reckoned of works, it is not of grace, but of debt." And this work system denies the virtue of Christ's atoning blood, and makes his life of obedience, his sufferings, death, and resurrection a vain and useless sacrifice; Galatians 2:21. The apostle then shows what the true condition of all who preach eternal salvation, or justification by performing conditions, or doing the works of the law, is; for he says, "For as many as are of the works of the law, are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." All are guilty, all have sinned, and the sentence of condemnation has passed upon all. All the promises and the curses in the law given by Moses to Israel were temporal and conditional, and their obedience to all its precepts and commands only secured to them national prosperity, and the land of Canaan; and by failing to keep the law, and to perform its conditions, they lost the land and all the blessings of that covenant. While that

conditional covenant or law could confer no spiritual blessings, nor justify the transgressor, it was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward. And to show the nature of a covenant, and what it really is, the apostle introduces our text: "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."

There has been much disputing among the clergy about the meaning of the word covenant; some arguing that it means a bargain or contract between parties; and our text is referred to as proof; for Paul says, "I speak after the manner of men." When men make a contract, and it is confirmed, it cannot be altered or changed, but it must stand just as the parties in the contract have agreed upon. But there is an exception to this; for the contracting parties may, by mutual consent, change or disannul their covenant; for having the power to make it, they have the power, by mutual consent, to change or disannul it. The learned tell me that the original word, *diatheke* signifies either a covenant, or testament; and in no place in the Scripture is it used to convey the idea of a contract made between God and other contracting parties. That in my text it means testament or will, looks plain; for after the death of the testator, the will is proven or confirmed, and it can not be disannulled or added to. The heirs are named in the will, and no one can be taken from or added to it. Every will set up in court must have personal election, and absolute predestination to make it a good will. Suppose that a will should be brought into court, bequeathing a large estate to any body, every body, or no body, just as it may happen; no heir named; no portion set apart to any heir; no time fixed when any one should be put in possession of the estate; the court would set the will aside because of these defects, and would say the testator was not in a sound mind, and not qualified to dispose of his estate. Strange, that a large majority of the professed ministers of the gospel will represent the will of God as being of this kind.

Once, when in a debate with one of Paul's Judaizers, I asked the question, "Can God's will be broken, or set aside?" He responded. "Yes, it has been broken, and will be broken again." I then responded, "Universal damnation must follow; for under a broken and set-aside will, no one could inherit, or recover an estate." This is true with a man's will or testament, and this is the point the apostle is here arguing; for he tells us that the law, which was given four hundred and thirty years after the covenant that was confirmed before of God in Christ, could not disannul, or make void the promise; for if the inheritance be by the law, it is no more of promise; or in other words, it is no more of the covenant confirmed before of God in Christ, and salvation and justification must be by the law, and not by Christ. The Judaizer may say, "Abraham is dead, and the covenant or promise made with him is also dead, and of no force." But the apostle responds, "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made." Then the Judaizer might say, "That embraces Abraham and all his posterity, and excludes the Gentiles forever." But the apostle would respond and say, "He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." The covenant promise is in the singular number, and Christ is the seed, and he ever liveth, and the covenant or testament is not left without an heir to claim the promise. But the Judaizer may object and say, "Then the promise can benefit none but the one person." But Paul anticipates this objection, and says, "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." The objector might say, "This is inconsistent; for the Gentiles never did exist in the loins of Abraham; if they did, the promise should be to seeds, in the plural." This objection is answered by the apostle in these words: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." But the objector may say, "This is an unaccountable, and irreconcilable contradiction in my mind; for if they did not exist in the loins of Abraham, how could they be blessed in that promise?" The answer is, The promise was not to Abraham and his seed according to the flesh, or because of a preexistence in his loins, but it was a promised seed, a given seed; for

Abraham was old, and Sarah, according to nature, was past the age of bearing children; but God by promise gave him a son, and as Isaac was, so are we children of promise. For God had given Christ a seed, a people, who should serve him. Moses says, "For the Lord's portion is his people: Jacob is the lot of his inheritance;" Deuteronomy 32:9. The words, portion and lot, clearly convey the idea of its descending to him by the will or testament of the Father. God, by the mouth of David, personating Christ said, "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession;" Psalms 2:7,8. Jesus, when speaking of his sheep, his chosen people, says, "My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all." His people were a gift from the Father, and it was to do the will of his Father, and redeem and save his people that he came into the world; for he says, "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me, I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day;" John 6:38,39. Christ always speaks of his people as a gift; for he says, "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me: and they have kept thy word;" John 17:6. And again it is said, "Behold, I, and the children which God hath given me:" Hebrews 2:13.

Christ is not spoken of in the Scriptures as a created mediator or head of the church; but as the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. As the Son of God he was begotten of the Father, and born of the virgin Mary, and called the Son of God, or Immanuel-God with us. He was the Son of God, as no created being ever was, or ever could be. When Christ claimed to be the Son of God, the Jews accused him of blasphemy; and on another occasion, they took up stones to cast at him, because he said God was his Father, making himself equal with God. They understood that there was an equality and relation that the Son bore to the Father, that no created being could claim. As man, Christ was the seed of the woman, the promised seed of Abraham, in whom the families of men were to be blessed. He was the

promised seed, and to him a people were given, and in the covenant of grace were made joint-heirs with him.

The apostle, having established the salvation and justification of the election of grace through the promise, and not by the works of the law, the objector might say, the law given by Moses did disannul the covenant or promise; for it talked so much about works, and so little about the promised Messiah. But to this the answer is, "If the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise." It would therefore be inconsistent with his holiness, immutability, faithfulness, and wisdom, by any subsequent act to set aside the promise, and so alter the way of justification which he had established. If the promise was given to Abraham and his promised seed, we may be sure that God would not retract, or change, or disannul his promise; for he is not a man, that he should change; but he is God, and of one mind, and changes not.

The apostle having fully shown that justification was not by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, and that the promise was full, complete, and sufficient, and was confirmed, so that it could not be disannulled by the law, which was given afterwards, then the objector may say, "Why did God give the law by Moses? and for what purpose was the law?" The answer is, "It was added because of transgression;" and it did not interfere with the promise, but was to remain until the promised seed should come. This again shows that the promised seed was a unit, one person, and that person was Christ; for the law was to continue until the seed which was Christ should come. The law was not given to disannul the promise, or change God's way of justifying his chosen people, who are sinners; but by the law is the knowledge of sin; Romans 3:20; and the law was given that the offense might abound; Romans 5:20.

The law was given because of sin, to expose sin, and to restrain man's wicked lusts; and the purifications and sacrifices under the law, which could not put away sin, were given to that people as types and shadows to direct them to the only way whereby sin was to be expiated, and pardoned, and

the sinner justified in the sight of God; that is, through the death, the blood, and by sacrifice of Christ, the promised seed. For this purpose the law was to continue until the seed should come, to whom, the promise was made; that is, till Christ shall come. But when the promised seed shall come, the blessings of the promise, and a full display of the riches and fullness of God's grace in the salvation and justification of his people, chosen out of all nations and peoples, shall be fully revealed and brought to light in the triumphant victory over death and the grave, obtained by the promised seed in his resurrection from the dead. Then the law shall have answered the purpose for which it was given, and shall pass away.

The apostle adds another difference between the law, or covenant of works, and the promise, or covenant of grace; for of the law, he says it was spoken by angels, and to different persons, and in a different manner from the promise made to Abraham, and for a different purpose. The law was given to the Israelites, as a peculiar people, that God had chosen and separated from the rest of the world. The promise was spoken by God himself, and made to Abraham and his seed in the singular, which was Christ; and it included all the election of grace, that were given to Christ of all nations, Gentiles as well as Jews; and in Christ they were blessed with all spiritual blessings.

As the promise was given immediately by God himself, and confirmed to Abraham; but the law was given only by the ministry of angels, in the hand of a mediator, who was a servant; therefore it is not to be presumed that the design was to set aside the promise made to Abraham a long time before the giving of the law. It is unreasonable to suppose that in a transaction between God and the Jewish nation only, he should make void the promise made to Abraham and his seed, in which all the families of the earth should be blessed, whether they be Jews or Gentiles. The law given by the dispensation of angels, could never disannul or make void the promise God himself had made. The one covenant was in the hand of a mediator who was only a servant of God; the Mediator of the other covenant was the Son

of God, and heir of all things; and he was as far above angels as the object of worship is above the worshipers; for angels were commanded to worship the Son; Hebrews 1:6. The law was a conditional, imperfect covenant, so that nothing was made perfect by it. Its best sacrifices could not put away sin, nor cleanse the worshipers from its stain and guilt. It is therefore unreasonable that it should set aside and make void the promise, or the unconditional covenant, that did make all things perfect, and bring in everlasting righteousness. Hence it is that Paul reproveth the Galatian brethren for returning to the law, and seeking justification by the works of the law, "For," says he, "As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse." For all our works and efforts cannot remove the curse, or give us a righteousness that can justify in the sight of God.

The apostle in his epistle to the Hebrew saints refers to the promise made to Abraham, as being confirmed by the oath of God, evidently to encourage them to wait with patience, as did Abraham, and bear their afflictions and persecutions; for the promise was as sure to them as it was to Abraham. And it was confirmed to them by the oath of him who cannot lie, and the same consolation or comfort belongs to all the heirs of that promise, or covenant. This promise or covenant is settled and fixed in the counsel of God who cannot lie, who says, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." Nothing can defeat it, for he who made it knows the end from the beginning, so that nothing new or unforeseen by him can arise to frustrate or defeat his purposes, and promises. "For men," says the apostle, "verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife." If a will is brought into court, and the witnesses to the will swear that it was the last will of the testator, and that he was in a sound state of mind to dispose of his estate, it settles the matter, and the heirs have no further doubt of receiving their estate. Then, why should the heirs of the heavenly estate fear? for God has settled all strife in this question, and that beyond what the oath of any man could do; for says the apostle, "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 on 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 vail;" Hebrews 6:17-19. "Wherein, God, willing more abundantly" than any earthly testator could do, or the oath of men could do, "to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath." As we have seen, a covenant or will, when confirmed, no man can take from it or add to it. It is the will of the testator, and must be carried out just as stipulated or specified in the will, and every heir must receive his portion according to the specifications. This will is confirmed by the immutable promise and counsel of God and by the oath of him that can not lie, and changes not. O what comfort this should give the heirs of promise! The road you travel may be a rough one, beset with enemies on every side; but the promise is sure; the full inheritance shall be obtained by every heir as sure as the oath and promise of God are true; for he has said, "*I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*" Then you may sing with a heart full of confidence,

**Fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismayed;
For I am thy God, and will still give thee aid;
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,
Upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand.**

Who can wonder at Paul's saying, "*For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us,*" (the heirs,)" *from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord;*" Romans 8:38,39. The inheritance is made sure to all the seed, or heirs set apart in the will; the Lord hath said it, and he will perform it.