

## Chapter 11

### THOUGH IT BE BUT A MAN'S COVENANT

*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. 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. 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 [annul], that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise. (Galatians 3:15-18)*

We often speak of God's attributes as we preach and teach the Word of God. The importance of considering His attributes cannot be over emphasized, nor can they be ignored if we are to arrive at a proper interpretation of the Word of God. Some of the attributes of God are Omniscience, Omnipotence, Omnipresence, Immutability, Righteousness, Holiness and Justice, as well as Love, Mercy and Grace. The very essence of God is Truth. He cannot lie.

God's Omniscience teaches us everything is known to God. He knows the beginning from the ending. Thus there is nothing that has happened, is happening, or ever shall happen that is not eternally known to God. God's Immutability teaches us God does not change, He is ... *the same*

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*yesterday, today, and forever.* God has functioned, is functioning and always shall function according to the revelation He has given of Himself in the Scriptures, both in His Person and in His work. There are many and varied presumptions concerning God, the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit being espoused in this world, but if these presumptions are not in agreement with the Scriptures, *rightly divided*, they are without authority and must be cast off as spurious.

There are also many people in this world who claim to believe many of the fundamentals of the Christian faith. This claim, of itself, does not in anyway authenticate a genuine faith, with a genuine inheritance in the things of God. We do not say this to be mean spirited, nor to be exclusivistic, but because Paul wrote, ... *the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.* This means there are not only men who claim to be Christians and are not, but there are Christian ministers who are counterfeits. They are both spiritually blind and spiritually dead, and our Lord said, *If the blind lead the blind, they both fall into a ditch.*

Take the Judaizers for example: they convinced the Galatians with counterfeit confessions they were Christians and they possessed authority from the church in Jerusalem to impose the rite of circumcision and the observance of the law upon the Galatians. This was a lie and was revealed as such by comparing its claims to the truth of the Scriptures. Thus Paul showed the Galatians the teachings of the Judaizers constituted *another gospel, which was not another.* This *other gospel* was contrary to the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. This lie had its roots in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and was, if believed, capable of damning those who embraced it.

Our Lord warned of such false prophets, and He revealed that they are known by their

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fruits. Further, the apostle John has provided a key to recognizing the source of their fruits:

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ [has come] in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ [has come] in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. (I John 4:1-3, emphasis mine)

*Confession* in this text is the Greek word *homologeō*. It does not mean *to acknowledge, or admit*, as in English. It means *to be in agreement with another*. The *Other*, in the Biblical sense of confession, is the Spirit of God, Who caused all of the Word of God to be written. Consequently to confess Christ is to be in agreement with the Word of God concerning the Person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. A non-confession of Christ would be a denial or disagreement with God about either the Person or the work of Jesus Christ, or both His Person and His work. A non-confession does not require a complete denial, but only a denial of one or more aspects of the Person or the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Judaizers' denial was by an addition to the gospel. The *other gospel* of the Judaizers required the rite of circumcision and the performance of the law of Moses as requisites for salvation. These additions failed to recognize that our Lord, in His Person and in His work, fulfilled all righteousness and every jot and tittle of the law in His life and in His death. Thus He provided the basis for the salvation of sinners by *grace through faith, apart from the deeds of the law*. Consequently the Judaizers' *other gospel* denied both the Person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because of this, Paul referred to the covenant God had given to Abraham, four hundred and thirty years before the law, to emphasize the promise of salvation, apart from the deeds of the

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law. He compared the promise God made to Abraham with promises men make with one another: *Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man [annulleth], or addeth thereto.*

When I was a youth, we used to say, *A man's word is his bond.* This is a rare commodity in today's world, but with men of honor, it is still true. There are men, who, if they give their word and seal it with a handshake, consider this to be more binding than a signed contract. Such men are known as men of their word. If sinful men can conduct their business affairs with other men with this kind of integrity, how much more the true and living God!

For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things [i.e., God's promise and God's oath], in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. (Hebrews 6:16-20)

The confirmation of God's Covenant with Abraham, by His oath and by His promise, precludes the possibility of the law (which came four hundred and thirty years later) altering the conditions of the covenant. Despite this truth, there are many in this world who claim to be believers in Jesus Christ, who would add the necessity of keeping the law to a Christian's relationship with the Lord. The primary reason for this is, they:

... being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. (Romans 10:3-4)

The false prophet, or false confessor, despite an outward appearance of belief in certain truths in the Word of God, has made a counterfeit confession of Christ. This will manifest itself

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at some point by a failure to *confess Christ* in the Greek meaning of the word. This will be a non-confession either of His Person, or of His work, or of both His Person and His work. Make no mistake, a Scriptural confession of faith in Christ can be made only by the power of the Holy Spirit of God. The Spirit acts upon the faithful preaching of the Word of God by quickening the truth preached to the hearts and minds of those who hear it. This quickening by the Spirit is regeneration. That is, the individual thus quickened has been created anew by the Spirit of God and the Word of God and is thus declared to be a child of God.

The Galatians, for the most part, were not false confessors. They were spiritual babes. The spiritual babe can exhibit spiritual ignorance, but unlike the false prophet, the spiritual babe will not (yea, he cannot) deny Jesus Christ in His Person or in His work. While the new Christian has the capacity to understand spiritual truth (by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit), this does not necessarily mean he has a spiritual reservoir to draw from. The new believer, through no fault of his own, is carnal and not spiritual. Paul revealed this fact to the Corinthians: *And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ* (I Corinthians 3:1).

It should be obvious, then, a new believer must grow in spiritual matters before he can begin to think in spiritual terms. Peter wrote that newborn babes in Christ should ... *desire the sincere milk of the word, that [they] may grow thereby*. Peter also wrote that the believer must ... *grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*. As we have seen, the grace of God is not something we can know or understand naturally. Consequently, until the believer's spiritual mind develops and grows in the grace of God, he will continue to think almost

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entirely in natural terms.

Do not misunderstand, the new believer knows he has been saved. He knows he belongs to the Lord. He knows some basic truths he has heard preached, but he certainly does not know the details of the work of God in his behalf. He does not have the ability, as a babe in Christ, to put the Scriptures in their immediate, as well as their overall, contexts. He does not have the spiritual growth to formulate doctrinal truths. These things must be learned.

With growth in grace, natural concepts will give way to spiritual concepts, and the believer will come to view himself according to God's judicial reckoning. He will begin to view himself through the value of the life and the death of Christ in his behalf. Consequently he will come to realize God views him in the perfect Righteousness of Christ: without compromising Himself in any manner. Thus Paul wrote to Timothy:

Thou therefore my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. (II Timothy 2:1-2)

It is not difficult to see how the people of Galatia came to be deceived by the Judaizers. The Judaizers simply appealed to the natural minds of the Galatians. The Judaizers managed to get them to reason apart from the Word of God, apart from the truth Paul had revealed to them, when he came and preached the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

To counter this, Paul revealed the immutability of God's promise to Abraham by using an illustration which all of the Galatians should have understood. He compared God's promise to Abraham to the promises men make with one another. He pointed out that even if it were a man's promise, it could not be altered by conditions that came about after the promise was made without

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approval by all of the parties involved. He reminded the Galatians, God gave the law to Moses four hundred and thirty years after He made His promise to Abraham.

Considering these facts, the promise of God to Abraham could not be contingent upon the performance of the law. Consequently salvation is by grace through faith, apart from the deeds of the law. Paul's revelation of the immutability of God's promise revealed to the Galatians that each portion of the Word of God must be considered in the light of its context. The immediate context must be considered in the light of all of the Word of God, which includes the attributes of God, that, of necessity, are an essential part of any interpretation.

Continuing with our text, Paul's next concern was with the grammar of God's promise to Abraham. He wrote, *He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ.* This is testimony to the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures: that the grammar of the text is essential to the proper interpretation of the text; despite the understanding of Moses, who recorded the text, or Abraham, to whom the promise was made.

We are not saying Abraham and Moses did not understand this promise to be fulfilled in Christ. What we are saying is that there is the possibility they did not understand the explicit details of the promise. Nevertheless the text is exact. This is also true of Daniel, who prophesied of events God did not allow him to understand, but said to him, ... *for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.* The point is: despite the understanding of Moses, or Abraham, the promise was to be fulfilled by a singular *seed*, and Paul revealed to the Galatians, the *Seed* was Christ. But this was not the understanding of the nation of Israel. They read the term *seed* to be a reference to themselves. This is very plainly seen in the national attitude of the Jews, so that

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John the Baptist said: ... *think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father; for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham* (Matthew 3:9).

And our Lord said:

I know that ye are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you. I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father. They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. (John 8:37-40)

The national pride of the Jews, which is exhibited in both of these portions of Scripture, was at the root of their unbelief. In the first place, the Jews perceived they were delivered from Egyptian bondage because they were morally better than the Egyptians. Upon deliverance from Egypt, they did not see the spiritual significance of the applied blood of the Passover Lamb to be the sole determining factor of whether a household suffered judgment in Egypt or was passed over.

Consequently, sixty days later, when the Jews had the opportunity to enter into a covenant of law with the Lord, they did not see this act as an act of unbelief against all that God had done in delivering them from Egypt. But upon hearing the law, they, with one accord, said, *All that the Lord our God hath spoken, we will do*. They clearly chose law, rather than grace, by which they had been delivered from Egypt, as the basis of their relationship with the Lord.

Israel's pride had gotten in the way. She reasoned one must be a Jew to be accepted of God. Quite naturally, then, they believed circumcision and law were an essential part of being a Jew. These twisted views are man's ways and not God's, and they certainly do not express the terms of God's promise to Abraham. Neither do they agree with the terms of the gospel, as it is

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revealed in both the Old and New Testament Scriptures.

Paul revealed the *seed* of Abraham was singular and not plural. Thus the promise was to be fulfilled in a Person and not by the nation. Further, even though Paul does not speak of this, the promise of the *seed* of Abraham was a further revelation of the promise God had made, in the judgment of the serpent, when He said: *And I will put enmity between thee [the serpent] and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel* (Genesis 3:15).

It was through the bruising of *the seed* of the woman, which is also *the seed* of Abraham, that God had determined to fulfill His promise to bless all of the families of the earth. Even though Paul did not make reference to the seed of the woman in his argument to the Galatians, we can see the promise of *the seed* was given in Eden and, a little over two thousand years later, to Abraham. So it was not just four hundred and thirty years before the law that we have the promise of *the seed*, but nearly twenty-five hundred years before the law. Indeed, the Omniscience and Immutability of God stands.

Finally, Paul said, *For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise.* Thus Paul, as a former lawyer, made a point of law. He reminded his audience God did not promise the inheritance to Abraham through the law. The inheritance was to come to all of the families of the earth through *the seed* of Abraham. Paul emphasized his point that the inheritance could not be by law for two reasons: the law came four hundred and thirty years after the promise, and the inheritance did not involve the law because it was given to Abraham by promise. Therefore salvation must, of necessity, be by promise, and

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not by the deeds of the law in order to agree with the Person and work of God, as revealed in the Scriptures.