

THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

"Behold I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." Rev. 22:12

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"COMMENTS ON GALATIANS 3 - No. 2." (Page 422)

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THE next verse that we come to, the 13th, is another "stone of stumbling" to many, but with an understanding of the 10th verse, it is impossible to go wrong on this. We quote it with the 14th:—

"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; that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

What is the curse of the law? Is it obedience to the law? No; for it is written, "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous." 1 John 5:3.

The psalmist also says: "Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord." Ps. 119:1. Now if the keeping of the law is a blessing, disobedience, with its consequences, must be the curse. And so Paul, after warning the Ephesians against whoredom, covetousness, and idolatry, says: "For because of these things the wrath of God [or the curse of God] cometh upon the children of disobedience." Eph. 5:6. And "the wages of sin is death." So "the curse of the law" is, in a word, death.

That death is the curse from which Christ has redeemed us, is evident from the latter part of the 13th verse. He redeemed us from the curse by being made a curse for us, and the curse which he suffered was his death,—being hanged on a tree. It was absolutely necessary that Christ should be made in all respects like those whom He would redeem. Heb. 2:17. He came to save sinners, therefore he was counted as a sinner. Isa. 53:12; 2 Cor. 5:21. And being found in fashion as a man, he suffered the curse which hung over guilty man. He died that we might live. And because he was made a curse for us, we may all through faith share in the blessing of Abraham.

"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 added' 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." Gal. 3:15, 16.

Here the apostle introduces a new point, the conclusion of the argument being, as stated in verse 21, that the law is not against the promises of God. He makes the positive and unquestionable statement that if a covenant be once confirmed it cannot afterwards be altered. Now the covenant was confirmed to Abraham by "two immutable things [God's promise and his oath] in which it was impossible for God to lie" (Heb. 6:15-18); therefore, as is stated in verse 17, the law given from Sinai four hundred and thirty years after, cannot make the promise void, nor destroy the fact that the inheritance is solely by promise. Thus the main idea of the chapter, that God's grace as manifested in Christ is man's sole hope, is kept prominent.

But there is still another point which we should not fail to consider in connection with the fifteenth verse. 1. Although the law "was four hundred and thirty years after" the covenant with Abraham, it was nevertheless in existence at that time, and long before, and was the basis of that covenant. Said God to Abraham, before making the promise: "Walk before me, and be thou perfect." Ex. 17:1. And in renewing to Isaac the promise made to

Abraham, God said it was "because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws." Ex. 26:5. Thus the law could not be against the promises of God, because the law was the foundation of the promises. 2. Although the covenant was confirmed in Christ to Abraham, it was only in anticipation. As the first covenant was confirmed by blood,—the blood of beasts,—so the second covenant was also ratified by blood,—the blood of Christ. Christ himself "confirmed the covenant with many for one week," in the midst of which he shed his blood on the cross, thus affixing the final seal to the covenant of God's grace. 3. As the commandments were the condition of the Abrahamic covenant, so they are of what is known as "the second covenant," which is in every respect the same as that made with Abraham. See Jer. 31:33; Heb. 8:10. None can deny that in his earthly ministry Christ taught the necessity of obedience to the law of God. See Matt. 5:17-19; 19:17; Luke 16:17, etc. Always, in the strongest terms, he proclaimed the enduring nature and obligation of God's law. Now since the death of Christ was the final ratification of the covenant, and since, as Paul says, when a covenant is confirmed no man can disannul or add thereto, it follows that after the death of Christ, no change in the covenant was possible. And since the law was one of the terms of the covenant, we are assured that not one jot nor one tittle could pass from it. The fact that God's law cannot be changed, we have learned before; but it is well to emphasize it in connection with the death of Christ. That which some suppose marked the abolition of the law, was that which emphasized its perpetuity. It is admitted, even by antinomians, that the law of God was in full force until the death of Christ, and therefore Gal. 3:15 should convince them that it is in full force now. Says Paul, "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid; yea, we establish the law." Rom. 3:31.

Verse 16 also shows that the promise is made only to Christ and to those who are his. In the verses following, 17-26, the apostle shows the relation of the law to the promise of God. "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. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise." Verses 17, 18.

What covenant was it that "was confirmed before of God in Christ"? Manifestly it was the covenant with Abraham, quoted in verse 8 from Gen. 12:1-3; 13:14,15; 17:7,8, and 22:18. The promise was that Abraham should be "heir of the world" (Rom. 4:11), and that in his seed all nations should be blessed. The condition was that he should walk before God and be perfect. Gen. 17:1-8. But this was not such a covenant as was made with the Israelites at Horeb. That one contained no reference to Christ, and no provision for the forgiveness of sins; the one with Abraham was confirmed "in Christ" (Gal. 3:17) and was made not on condition that he should be righteous by his own unaided efforts, but was made on condition of his having the righteousness of faith. Compare Rom. 4:11 with 3:22-25. This of course involved the forgiveness of his sins; and so we see that the covenant with Abraham (which is the one referred to in this chapter) was exactly the same as "the second covenant," which is made with us. The covenant made at Horeb, and called "the first covenant," although it was after that made with Abraham, was, as we have before learned, only for the purpose of showing the people the need of the help promised in the Abrahamic or second covenant.

Now the apostle says that the law, which was formally announced from Sinai four hundred thirty years after the covenant with Abraham, cannot disannul that covenant, 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." That is, if the inheritance be given to those who depend upon their own deeds for justification, then it is not by promise. If it be bestowed because of works, then faith in Christ is ruled out. But this, he says, cannot be; for God gave the inheritance to Abraham by promise, contingent on his faith.

The reader can readily see the force of the apostle's argument. He is trying to convince the Galatians, and with them all men, that out of Christ there is no salvation. The man who hopes to gain an inheritance in the kingdom of God through his own works, no matter how high his aim may be, will fail. The promise is not for works, lest

any man should boast; but it is through faith in Jesus Christ, that he may be "Lord of all." "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."
Acts 4:12.

W.