

May 4, 2008

# THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL

## *The Blessing of Abraham - The Promise of the Spirit*

### **Galatians 3:13 – 14, 19-22**

The whole thrust of Paul's message here in Galatians is that the Christian life is a life that is begun by faith, carried on by faith and ultimately finished by faith. All those who are of faith then are blessed with the same blessing Abraham received, and safeguarded from the curse that comes from trying to make it on our own, trying to achieve our own righteousness. If you are not living by faith, you live under the curse of the law that condemns – it does not save us. But Christ came to redeem us from the curse *'...in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.* Galatians 3:14

And last week we looked at the truth that the blessing of Abraham comes to us **in Christ Jesus**. The blessing of Abraham is centered in Christ. It is **God in Christ, through the Holy Spirit in us to be our life and life supply – to make us sons of Abraham, sons of God, bearing His nature and likeness for His great glory and name.** The promise was fulfilled by Christ and we inherit the promise by virtue of union with Christ. It is **in Christ** that we experience the great blessing of Abraham. And to be **in Christ** we saw means that **we are clothed with Christ**. That is everything in our lives relate to Christ, we are wrapped up in Him. He is the center and the circumference of our existence. To be a Christian is to be in Christ. This is the first thing.

The second thing is that the blessing of Abraham is something Paul calls the **promise of the Spirit**. What Paul is saying here is that in Christ we receive the promise of the Spirit – and this too is by faith. So what is the promise of the Spirit? Jesus spoke about the promise of the Spirit several times between His resurrection and ascension. In Luke He tells the disciples: *And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.* Luke 24:49 And in His last words to them in Acts 1:4 He *'...ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, He said, you heard from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.'* **So we should understand that the promise of the Father, the blessing of Abraham, is the promise of the Spirit.**

In John 14, in the upper room, that last night before the cross, Jesus was giving the disciples some final words: *And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. You know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.* John 14:16-17 And in verse 26 Jesus says, *But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.* John 14:26

So **the promise of the Spirit is the promise of the Father to send a Helper**. The word is translated variously as Helper, Comforter, Advocate, and Counselor and it comes from the Greek word – **paraclete**. And in Greek, a *paraclete* is someone who comes alongside another to help. The literal translation is **someone who is called or sent for to assist**. And that, Jesus says is the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, 'I'm going away – but the Father is sending you someone to help.'

And how does the Holy Spirit help? First of all, **He regenerates us**. Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3 *Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.* Before the Holy Spirit – we were dead in our trespasses and sins. But it is the work of the Holy Spirit to make us alive. Something happens when we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ – our spirit, deadened by sin, is made alive in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Jesus told the disciples while He was with them: *You know Him [the Holy Spirit] for He dwells with you and will be in you.*

The Holy Spirit was with them in the person of Christ while He was on earth – now there would be a more intimate communion because He would be **in** them – not merely **with** them. In the Old Testament we see the Holy Spirit coming **on** people – in the New Testament He is **in** them. The prophets spoke of this promise repeatedly. In Ezekiel the Lord says: *"I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.* Ezekiel 36:27 The law of God on the outside only condemns – but the law of God on the inside, through the Holy Spirit brings life.

Secondly, **the Holy Spirit empowers us.** Jesus told His disciples to '*...stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high*'. The work of the Holy Spirit is to empower us to live this Christian life. The word power in the Greek is *dunamis* – **and it means that power which is inherent in something, or the power that resides in a thing by virtue of its nature.** And the nature of this power is that it is God-power. The power that brought this universe into existence – the same power that raised Jesus from the dead – this power is now the power that works within the believer – changing his life – transforming his mind and emotions and will to be conformed to the image of Christ.

The Bible says this in many different ways. In Romans Paul tells us: *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.* Romans 15:13 And in 1 Corinthians: *and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,* 1 Corinthians 2:4 And in Ephesians: *that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,* Ephesians 3:16 *Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us,* Ephesians 3:20 And in 2 Timothy: *for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.* 2 Timothy 1:7 As a believer, we have a new power source – the Holy Spirit.

But too often we are like the guy who went to the hardware store to buy a chainsaw because he had ten acres of trees that needed to come down. The salesman there sold him a brand new Stihl guaranteed to go through wood like a hot knife through butter. In fact the salesman said that even a novice could cut down 30-40 trees a day with this baby. A week later, a very unhappy customer came back to report that the chainsaw he bought must be faulty - he averaged only 3 trees a day. The salesman grabbed the saw, pulled the cord, and fired it up. "Hey" demanded the startled customer "what's that noise?" The power of God resides in us through the Holy Spirit and yet we rely on our own strength rather than on His.

**The Holy Spirit is also our teacher.** *But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.* John 14:26

*When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth, for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak, and He will declare to you the things that are to come. 14 He will glorify Me, for He will take what is Mine and declare it to you.* John 16:13-14

But the thing of it is, the Holy Spirit does not teach into a vacuum. The word says that He takes what is Christ's, and declares it to us – or makes it known. And the implication is that we need to have been in the word of God for this to happen. This is one of the reasons we need to have the word of God written on our hearts. In some respects, I believe, the output will never be greater than the input. If we do not have God's word stored up within, I don't think we can expect the Holy Spirit to work with a blank slate. The Holy Spirit works to bring to our remembrance the word of God. If we are to have some remembrance – then we need to have remembered it first of all.

When Jesus was in Jerusalem, early on in His ministry, He went through the Temple, driving out the moneychangers and overturning their tables and the Scriptures record that '*...His disciples remembered that it was written, Zeal for your house will consume Me.*' That indicates that they knew what the Scriptures said about the Messiah and the Holy Spirit applied it to their hearts at that juncture. And when the Jews asked Him to give them a sign that what He was doing was from God – He said, *Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.* And no one understood at that point that He was talking about His own body, but the very next verse says, *When therefore He was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that He had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.* John 2:22 **The Holy Spirit takes the word of God and brings it alive to our hearts.** One of the ways to know that the Holy Spirit indwells you, is that the word of God comes alive. It is not just stories and miracles and ragged prophets and unpronounceable names and lists of begats – **but it becomes the very breath of God through the work of the Holy Spirit**

**The work of the Holy Spirit is to convict as well.** *And when He comes, He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment:* John 16:8 No one comes to Christ but that the Father draws him. And that drawing is firstly a conviction that he is a sinner in need of a Savior, an unrighteous soul in need of justification, and in danger of the awful judgment of a Holy God. If you think you have come to Christ, but have never had that conviction of sin, and righteousness and the coming judgment – you have not come to Christ. Many people have made some sort of confession of Christ that is based good moral choices, or an attempt to relieve some nagging guilt, or the hopes of prosperity and health. But they have never been truly convicted by the Holy Spirit of the awfulness of their sin and their utter inability to satisfy the righteous requirements of the holy Law of God – and they are not saved. The wonderful work of the Holy Spirit to convict is life saving.

So if the promise of the Spirit is to **convict, to regenerate, to empower, to teach** why did God send the law? This is what Paul says in verse 19: *Why the Law then?* If God meant us to live by the Spirit – why introduce something that has no possibility of saving us? And then Paul goes on to give several reasons God gave the law. And this morning we will close with the first of those reasons.

He says continuing in verse 19, *It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made.* Now the question here is does this mean the law was given to produce transgressions or to punish the transgressions that were already there? To get some light on this turn to Romans 5:20 where Paul says, *'Now the law came in to increase the trespass...'* To put that in plain terms, the law was given to increase sin. In Romans 7:13 Paul says, *Did that which is good [the law], then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.* What is the Bible saying?

I think we see two things here. The first is that **the law of God was given to expose sin as sin.** The Bible tells us that where there is no law there is no transgression. That is where the law is absent, people feel free to do as they like. I remember driving through Montana back in the day and realizing that I couldn't be pulled over for speeding because there was no speed limit – no law that said you must not exceed 70 miles an hour. **And what the law of God does is expose the sinfulness of our hearts. It shines a spotlight on all the rebellion and unbelief that resides in us that keeps us from God.** It is like poking a sleeping lion with a stick. I can guarantee you that if you sneak up on a sleeping lion and poke him with a stick, he's going to eat your lunch. It isn't the stick that makes him react that way – but it sure exposes his real nature. That is the law.

Secondly, **the law is the agent God uses to arouse sin.** The law does not just expose our sin, it gives rise to more sin. The rebellion and unbelief of our hearts actually increases when met by the law. If you don't believe me, just try a simple experiment, just tell your one year old – 'NO!' Paul illustrates this again in Romans 7: *What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, You shall not covet. But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead.* Romans 7:7-8

If all we had were the law – sin is strengthened – not killed. Until the law comes – our sin is invisible as it were – unexposed. That is why the world has no problem with adultery, sex before marriage, homosexuality and abortion. The law of God is not exposing them, making sin exceedingly sinful. If by chance they hear something contrary to their blissful pursuit of personal freedom – they plug their ears and chant until it goes away. **But the law was added to turn invisible sin into visible violations of law and to stir up the rebellion and unbelief of the human heart and make it sinful beyond measure.**

So Paul asks the question: *Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law.* Galatians 3:21 The clear implication is that the law is not a life-giver – and so it cannot be the means to fulfilling the promise of God. And the problem is not with the law – the problem is with us. Paul says again in Romans 8: *For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.* Romans 8:3-4

The law cannot save because the law cannot deal with the flesh where sin dwells – only the Holy Spirit has that power. *But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.* Galatians 3:22 This is so that there could be no possibility of anyone standing back and saying, 'I'm not a sinner – I'm okay.' The Scripture – and by this Paul means the law of God – has shut up or confined everyone under sin with no apparent avenue for escape. That is why when people look deep inside themselves to find God – they only find sin.

But the good news this morning is the blessing of Abraham – the promise of the Holy Spirit to convict, regenerate, to empower and to teach. As we come to the Table of the Lord this morning, let the promise of the Spirit resound in your heart and mind and speak to you of freedom from sin and death and condemnation and of joy and gladness in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

*Our gracious Father,*

*It is good that You give us a glimpse of our wretchedness before You. Sin is our greatest evil but You are our greatest good. Our lips are ready to confess but our hearts are too slow to feel. Heal the unbelieving numbness that deadens our senses to sin. We offer our souls to You to break, to wound, to heal, to bend, to mold into Your image. Unmask us to sin's depravity that we might hate it, abhor it, flee from it into Your blessed arms of redemption. Work in us a more profound and abiding repentance. Grant us Lord, the fullness of godly grief that trembles and fears, yet ever trusts and loves and is ever powerful, ever confident of Your great love for us. Grant that through the tears of repentance we may see more clearly the brightness and glories of the saving cross of Christ, and that we who have been made glad in God should live to make others glad in You as well, we pray in the precious life-giving name of Jesus, Amen.*

***May the Lord bless you and keep you  
and make His face shine upon you.  
May the Lord be gracious unto You.  
May the Lord lift up His countenance on you  
and give you peace.***