

“Heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:29)

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THE APOSTLE Paul, writing to the believers in Galatia at a time when some of them had lapsed from the true faith, issued a firm rebuke to them, saying: “O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?” (Gal. 3:1). This is a serious charge, and, in his eagerness to encourage and consolidate the members as a single unified body of loyal disciples of Jesus, their Lord and Master, he then reaches out to them with that wisdom and pastoral care which are characteristic features of all his epistles.

This was that wisdom which never failed to emphasise the great hope that was theirs if only they remained steadfast and unwavering in their Christian discipleship. Note the masterly manner in which he handles the matter, drawing attention to the glorious blessing that will be bestowed upon them if they continue their walk faithfully towards the Kingdom: “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ . . . And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (vv. 27,29).

The word “heirs” is interesting in this context, for it derives from the Greek *kléronomos*, which, according to Vine, means “one who obtains a lot or portion”—quite expressive, we might think. The matter is dwelt on by Paul in this epistle because of the disturbing influence of some of the Jewish Christians in the ecclesia, who insisted that it was necessary to incorporate the ordinance of circumcision and other elements of the Law of Moses in their doctrinal precepts. This situation leads the apostle to give his uncompromising ruling on the subject, declaring: “But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith” (v. 11).

The promise to the Romans

Paul dwells upon the very appealing and vital theme of ‘heirs’ in some of his other letters. For instance, in the Epistle to the Romans he does

this with great effect, and no doubt he invigorated the brethren and sisters at Rome with renewed enthusiasm and determination in their discipleship. He says to them with considerable feeling and affection: “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God . . . and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together” (8:14,17).

Paul takes the opportunity to remind the members at Rome that, because of the propensity of human nature to sin, they were not able to observe the Mosaic Law in its entirety. They were no longer bound by its constraints, but were under a new law, focalised and exemplified in the teachings, atoning work and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. This he points out to them with lucidity, averring: “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (vv. 3,4).

The promise in later epistles

Paul continued in later epistles to dilate upon this very important matter of being heirs of salvation. This was the vital hope that he kept before the disciples, both Jew and Gentile, as a motivating force in their daily lives in Christ. We see this reflected in his epistle to the believers at Ephesus, writing of “the mystery . . . that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel” (3:3,6).

The apostle is meticulous in his role as pastor and mentor of the developing ecclesia. He impresses upon the members the nature of the blessing that would ultimately be theirs in the Kingdom of Christ. This he does in his epistle to his trusted co-worker, Titus, with the words: “For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and

hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us . . . that being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (3:3-7).

This was the earnest Paul, driven by his unremitting "care of all the churches" (2 Cor. 11:28) that was so heartfelt in all that he did in the saving name of Jesus. He was often moved to tears by his loving concern for the spiritual welfare of the brethren and sisters, as shown in these words to the ecclesia at Corinth: "For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you" (2:4).

What Paul says to the true believers in Rome, Galatia, Ephesus and other ecclesias, and also to his co-workers Titus and Timothy, he also says to us in these last troubled times. We should hold his words dear as the very precepts taught by our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, concerning love, faith, truth, kindness, forgiveness, patience, gentleness and humility, as we walk together in unity towards the Kingdom, always bearing in mind that "if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29).

The faith of Abraham

We recall that Abraham was told by his God: "I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great . . . and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:2,3). How truly wonderful it is that the immutable Word of God brings together the believers of all ages in His great, merciful plan of redemption! Paul puts it well as he says: "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that

only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all" (Rom. 4:16).

The exclusive, carping Pharisees, in their arrogance and self-righteousness, said to Jesus: "We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?" (Jno. 8:33). This was in answer to what Jesus had said to them moments before in his concern for their salvation: "Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (vv. 31,32). Knowing that the Jewish leaders held Abraham in high regard as the father of their nation, Jesus then left them in no doubt whatever that Abraham, in his great faith, had envisioned the coming of Messiah, as he said to them: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad" (v. 56).

The last part of that truly wonderful promise to faithful Abraham in Genesis 12, "and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed", offers us great comfort, and enlivens our hope of salvation in these last, tempestuous times, as the lights of morality and Christian observance are being extinguished in a world that has wittingly gone its own sinful way. It is just as it was in the days of the Judges, when the people flaunted their disregard for the laws of God: "In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judg. 17:6).

Our heavenly Father, in His great love and mercy, made it possible for us to become His faithful children; for we are "in Christ", and, as we have seen, "if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise". This is our privileged position today, but only if we remain true to our calling as fully committed followers of our Lord and Saviour.

UN considers stance on Israeli wall

The UN Security Council recently discussed calls by the Palestinian Authority for a resolution demanding an end to Israel's construction of a security wall in the West Bank. The move followed a separate Syrian-drafted resolution condemning Israel's recent attack on its territory. European and other countries have called for the Syrian text to condemn terrorist groups, a link it does not accept. The US says it will vote against any resolution that does not explicitly condemn Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade, and demand the dismantling of the infrastructure that supports them.—*Joan Brooks*