

Sermon Series: *The Letter of Paul to the Galatians*

Those of Faith Are Sons of Abraham

Galatians 3:6-9

6 just as Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness?

7 Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.

8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, In you shall all the nations be blessed.

9 So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

As we continue on in our journey through Paul's letter to the churches in Galatia, we sense the burden in his heart as he fights for the truth of the gospel. We know that it is only the truth that sets our souls free and these believers in Galatia are in danger of believing a lie. The lie has to do with the twisting of the true gospel that Paul preached into a false, non-gospel that was being preached.

The lie has been brought in by false teachers called Judaizers. These false teachers had tried to discredit the authority of Paul as well as the gospel he was preaching. They said that he was not an official apostle authorized by the Jerusalem apostles. Paul answered that charge by saying his apostleship came from God through Jesus Himself therefore he did not need the blessing of the apostles in Jerusalem. However, he then went on to tell of his meeting with the apostles in Jerusalem and their subsequent blessing of the gospel that he was preaching.

Paul also shared with the Galatians the time he rebuked the eminent apostle Peter when Peter's actions were out of step with the gospel. Paul shared this for two reasons. First, because it was a demonstration of his apostolic authority and secondly, because it presented an opportunity to explain to these Gentiles living in Galatia the true nature of the gospel.

The essence of the gospel that Paul wanted to make abundantly clear was the basis of justification. On what basis are men and women justified before God? Remember that justification refers to the legal declaration of "not guilty." So on what basis can sinful humans be declared righteous in the sight of a Holy God? Is it doing good works and keeping the law, as the false teachers taught? Paul had taught these Galatian Gentiles that justification before God was based solely upon faith alone in Jesus. A person is justified only through faith in Jesus.

These false teachers, however, had come in after Paul had departed and were preaching that faith alone was not enough. They were teaching that one must be circumcised and obey the law of Moses. Paul is vehemently arguing against this view. So in the beginning of chapter three he asks them the question, "How did you receive the Holy Spirit? Was it by doing the works of the law or by hearing with faith?" (Gal 3:5).

The answer of course was by hearing and putting faith in the gospel of Jesus because as Gentiles they did not have the law and had not been keeping it, yet God's Holy Spirit had been mightily working among them. In chapter 3:1-5 Paul appealed to their personal experience. He pointed them

back to their own personal encounter with the gospel. He was asking them, “Does not your own conversion tell you that you are not required to be circumcised and keep the law in order to justified before God (which was signified by His gracious giving of His Holy Spirit)? However, Paul knew that personal experience would not be enough to convince them. And so he turns to a biblical example. He points them to Abraham.

Justification By Faith Alone: As Demonstrated In The Example of Abraham

It is possible that these Judaizers had been pointing to Moses as grounds for their insistence upon circumcision, since being circumcised was part of keeping the law as it was given by Moses. If this is the case, then Paul may be going beyond Moses to the very source of Jewish heritage, to Abraham himself. “You Judaizers have not gone far enough. Let’s go past Moses to the man who was the source of circumcision. Let’s go back to Abraham.”

Or it could be that the Judaizers were pointing to Abraham as validation for insisting upon circumcision since Abraham himself was the first person with whom God established the covenant of circumcision (Gen. 17). If this is the case, then Paul is also using Abraham, but in such a way to demolish the requirement of circumcision in order to be righteous before God. If this was in fact the case, then this argument would have devastated the argument of the false teachers.

Galatians 3:6-7

6 just as Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness?

7 Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.

Paul is appealing to Abraham as an example that justification (i.e. being declared righteous) comes only through faith. It is as if Paul were arguing with these false teachers and saying, “OK, if you want to use Abraham as ground for arguing that circumcision *is* necessary for justification (i.e. salvation, cf. Acts 15:1, 5), I also will use Abraham to prove to you that circumcision is *not* necessary for justification before God.” So Paul quotes Genesis 15:6.

Genesis 15:6

6 And he believed the LORD, and He counted it to him as righteousness.

When sinful humans trust God that His word is true and that He will keep His promises, God accounts that trusting as righteousness. Abraham believed the promise of God and God credited that ‘believing’ to him as righteous. In other words, Abraham put his faith in God, therefore God declared him to be righteous. This took place at least 13 years before Abraham was circumcised.¹ So faith & righteousness came to Abraham long before circumcision ever did. Therefore, circumcision is not necessary to be righteous before God. Faith alone is the sole requirement to be righteous in the eyes of God. Paul then states the obvious conclusion in verse 7.

Galatians 3:7

7 Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.

This is the main point of the text for today. Paul states this truth twice in these three verses. He states it here in verse 7 and he states it again in verse 9. This is the central truth that Paul wants us to

¹ See Genesis 15:6 for when Abraham was declared righteous. This took place before the birth of Ishmael, Abraham being 86 years old when he was born (Gen. 16:16). Abraham was not circumcised until he was 99 years old (Gen. 17:1, 23-24).

know. He says, “**Know this...**” It is a command. We must know this! And we must not allow anyone to move us away from this truth. **Know this!** Know what? What does he want us to know?

Paul wants us to know that ***faith alone is the prerequisite to be righteous in God's eyes***. You do not have to clean up your life before you come to God. You come to Him as the sinful mess you really are and you believe then that God (by His Spirit and in cooperation with yours) will do the cleaning up that is necessary. Believing the promises of God is all that He requires to welcome you into His kingdom. In order to be welcomed into the kingdom of God, one must become a child of Abraham and faith is all that it takes to become a child of Abraham. Anyone who does not possess the faith of Abraham will not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

The Goal of Life: To Become A Child of Abraham

Note two observations from verse 7. Notice first that Paul assumes that **THE** goal of life is to become a child of Abraham. He assumes that all the readers of this letter desire this. He assumes that all the people who make up the churches in Galatia want to become a child of Abraham. Remember that these people are primarily Gentile. He was writing to Gentiles and telling them that their greatest need was to be sure that they were children of Abraham.

This we need to hear today. Today we need to hear this. But, tell me, who today desires this? How many people yearn to be a child of Abraham? How many New Englanders feel the need to become a child of Abraham? Not many, why? Because to most people Abraham is some old dead guy that only floats around in stories for children. But the reason this is important is because Abraham is not dead! He is alive! His spirit is alive! His body is dead but his spirit lives on.

Once the Sadducees were debating with Jesus about whether or not there was life after death and Jesus said, “Remember what God said? He said, ‘I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.’ Jesus then said, “He is not the God of the dead, but of the living!” (Mark 12:27).

This is important because it has to do with the life and death of the souls of men & women!

Physical Descent Not Required To Become A Child of Abraham

Secondly, notice that physical descent is not required to become a child of Abraham. “***It is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.***” Becoming a true child of Abraham happens through faith not through your biological father.

Romans 9:7-8

7 and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.”

8 This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.

Parentage is not the key to heaven. Believing the promise is. Having powerful and influential parents may bring an earthly reward, but it will certainly not bring you the heavenly reward.

Romans 2:28-29

28 For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical.

29 But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

The Folly of Trusting In the Flesh

The essence of becoming a child of Abraham happens as a result of the work of the Holy Spirit which He works in the heart and not in the flesh. Becoming a child of Abraham happens in the spirit, not in the flesh. There are many Jews who are physically descended from the lineage of Abraham, but do not possess the faith of Abraham. Therefore, though they may fall in the line of his physical lineage they do not fall in line with his spiritual lineage. In that sense they are not truly his children in the deepest and most significant way. They may be descended from his flesh, but they are not descended from his faith. John the Baptizer warned the Jews of the folly of trusting in physical heritage.

Matthew 3:7-10

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

8 Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

9 And do not presume to say to yourselves, We have Abraham as our father, for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.

10 Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

God was keeping His promise by raising up offspring for Abraham and He was doing it through people who were genuinely repentant of their sins. John saw through the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and Sadducees. They were not repentant. There had been no inward change of the heart. They were merely going through an outward religious ritual of baptism, while their sinful hearts remained unwashed and unclean.

They were coming for baptism not because they were repentant of their sins, but because it was the popular thing to do. Everyone was getting baptized and the Pharisees and Sadducees wanted to look good in the eyes of the people so they were going through the outward sign of baptism. However, that baptism was not beneficial because external religious rituals have no power to bring about internal change. Baptism is only meaningful if it truly accords with a heart that has already been washed clean by the powerful inward working of the Holy Spirit.

Being physically descended from Abraham was not enough. So John warned them not to trust in the fact that they were descended from Abraham. No one will pass through the Judgment of God sheltered under Abraham's faith. No one will pass through the Judgment of God sheltered under anyone else's faith, whether that be the faith of mother or father, sister or brother, or husband or wife. Each person must exercise his or her own faith. Only those under the blood of Jesus will pass safely through the Judgment.

Yet the Jews did put faith in their physical heritage. So Jesus exposed this sin.

The Truth Will Set You Free

In a conversation with the Jews one day, Jesus said to them,

John 8:31-34, 36

31 "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

33 They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, You will become free?"

34 Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin."

36 "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

The truth is no one is free from sin. We have all sinned, therefore sin has authority over us all. Those under sin can only be freed from sin by someone over whom sin has no authority. Sinners can only be delivered from sin by one who has never sinned. Only the Son has never sinned. Jesus is the only one without sin, therefore only Jesus can truly free sinners from the power of sin.

No Need To Be Freed

Yet these Jews did not see themselves as being under the power of sin therefore they thought they had no need to be freed. In the same way, the people all around us do not see their need to become true children of Abraham. No one on the street considers himself or herself a slave of sin. Even if you could get someone to admit that they did in fact commit a sin, I doubt many would consider themselves a slave to sin. Yet this is exactly how Jesus describes the situation. Anyone who commits sin is a slave to it!

John 8:37-44

37 "I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you. 38 I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father."

39 They answered him, "Abraham is our father."

This is twice now that they have stated this.

Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing what Abraham did, 40 but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did.

41 You are doing what your father did." They said to him, "We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father—even God."

This is sword thrust revealing their disgust that Jesus' mother got pregnant out of wedlock.

Do you also see how they connected being a child of Abraham with being a child of God?

42 Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. 43 Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word.

44 You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires.

Just after this they said to Him, "You are a demon possessed Samaritan" (John 8:48) and then just a few minutes later they were ready to stone Him (because Jesus claimed to have existed before Abraham did which they understood to be equal to claiming to be God).

Not Everyone Is A Child of God

This is the painful truth of this world. Not everyone is a child of God. Many people are "of their father the devil" and they are not aware of it. So deceived are they that they would even find that idea repugnant.

Only One Thing Is Necessary

What Paul is trying to explain to these Galatians (and all who read this) is that there is only one thing necessary in order to become a child of God and that is faith! Faith in Jesus is the only requirement for entrance into heaven. Faith is the sole basis of justification before God. It is not praying five times a day (or nine times a day), it is not baptism, it is not giving away all your money, or feeding all the hungry of the world, or clothing all the naked. As children of God we will most certainly do those things, but *it is not the doing of those things that is the basis upon which we are declared righteous by God.* No man or woman will be saved on the basis of doing good deeds.

Justification By Faith Was Always the Plan

We are justified by God through the individual exercise of faith in the risen Lord Jesus. And this was always the plan. The sinners of the Old Testament were saved the same the sinners of the New Testament were saved and it is the same way sinners are saved today. **We are all saved by faith!**

The way of salvation has always been the same. The gates of heaven are opened by the key of faith. They always have been and always will be. Abraham was justified by faith and so is everyone whom God receives, whether Jew or Gentile. And in verse 8 Paul says that the Scriptures predicted this.

Galatians 3:8

And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed."

Gentiles Included In God's Plan of Salvation

Paul is quoting **Genesis 12:3**. He is saying that it has always been God's plan from the beginning to justify the Gentiles by faith and not by works of the law. God had always intended to save Gentiles through faith and not through making them Jewish. We know this because this gospel, i.e. good news, was spoken long before the law was ever given. This promise was given to Abraham long before the law was given to Moses.

Notice that Paul personifies the Scripture. He says, "*Scripture... preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham...*" and then he quotes the words of God. Paul's understanding of Scripture is that what is written in Scripture are the very words of God so that God is speaking through the Scriptures. It is verses like this one that causes us to conclude that what Scriptures says, God says. To obey Scripture is to obey God and to disobey Scripture is to disobey God.

Justification By Faith Is Biblical Doctrine

Paul is proving that this doctrine of justification by faith alone is biblical. He is not preaching a gospel that is unbiblical. God revealed beforehand that "all nations" would be blessed through Abraham. "All nations" refers to the Gentiles. Abraham was justified by faith and so "all nations" will be justified by faith just like Abraham was.

In saying "In you shall all nations be blessed," it is implied that each nation retains it's own identity as a nation or else it would say, "In you will all nations be blessed when they all become Jews (or when they join themselves to the one blessed nation)." God never intended all nations to disappear by joining the nation of the Jews.

God said, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” What does he mean? He certainly does not mean what the Judaizers meant, which was that you had to be circumcised, that is, you had to become “in Abraham” by converting to Judaism.

All Nations Need To Do What Abraham Did

*He means that it is possible for people of all nations, both Gentiles and Jews, to become the personal beneficiaries of the promises that God gave to Abraham. This happens when, as Jesus said in John 8:39, we “do what Abraham did.” What did Abraham do? Abraham believed the promises of God. All of those promises found their fulfillment in Jesus (2 Cor 1:20). Paul says in Gal 3:16 that those promises of God were made to Abraham and to his **offspring who is Christ**.*

The Blessings of Sonship

So in putting our faith in Christ we become sons of God (Gal 3:26). And if we are in Christ, then we are Abraham’s offspring, and therefore heirs according to the promise (Gal 3:29). And as heirs, what do we inherit? What blessings do we receive by being Abraham’s children?

The Blessing of Justification

The first is what Paul has already been writing about; justification. The first blessing that comes through faith in Jesus is justification. When we exercise faith in Jesus God declares you “not guilty and possessing righteousness.” By putting faith in Jesus all sin is removed from us and complete righteousness is credited to us! This means God couldn’t love us any more and will not love us any less. In justification all barriers to God are removed.

The Blessing of the Holy Spirit

Secondly, we receive the Holy Spirit.

Galatians 3:14

— so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

The Holy Spirit is our greatest need and the greatest gift we could ever receive (Lk 11:13). It is the Spirit of God who gives life and without His Spirit we have no life. Jesus said to His disciples,

John 6:63

“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is of no avail. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.”

The greatest reason we need to become sons of Abraham is so that we will have life. The deadness of sin has infected the souls of us all. This sickness leads to death. The only antidote is to receive a life infusion, that is, **we need to receive the Holy Spirit**. We receive the Holy Spirit when we put our faith in Jesus.

We learn today that only in Dr. Abraham’s house can we receive the antidote to the deadly virus that has infected us. We must therefore go and knock on Dr. Abraham’s door and say, “I’ve been infected and I understand that my condition is terminal. I hear that you have the cure. Will you give it to me?”

Dr. Abraham replies, “The antidote only works on those who are members of my family. If you will live, then you must forsake your family and join my family.” In sad shock we reply, “Is that possible

for me to become part of your family?" Abraham replies, "No. Not be natural means." My heart sinks as I realize all hope is gone. As I hesitate at the door, Dr. Abraham speaks again.

"But it is possible by supernatural means and it will cost you your life." He opens the door a bit wider and he points inside to a man nailed to the wall and he says, "Do you see that man? If you will put your faith in Him, then He will save your life." "How?" Dr. Abraham says, "His blood has the antibodies that will cure the sickness. We will give you a complete blood transfusion. We will drain all your poisoned blood from your body and you will die. Then we will pump His blood into your veins and you will live. Do you believe this? Will you believe in Him?"

I ask, "But won't that hurt?" He smiles and says, "Yes. But it will hurt less than dying. And being a member of my family brings eternal blessings that you cannot even imagine. What do you say? Will you put your faith that man? He is my son you know. His name is Jesus."

Galatians 3:9

So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.