

Galatians 3:6-9 "Are You a Spiritual Jew?"

GAL 3:6-9 "Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith."

Up to this point Paul has been contrasting the law and grace. One approach to God depends on certain works men can do to please God, while the other approach, that of grace, depends on what God has done for us.

And then, in chapter three Paul begins to bring to mind how the Lord has personally worked in the lives of these Galatian Christians as He has brought them from death to life, which is demonstrated in verses 2-5 as he asks the questions:

"Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Have you suffered so much for nothing - if it really was for nothing? Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?"

But now Paul moves from the personal spiritual experiences of these Galatians to a more substantive consideration found in the very word of God itself which clearly delineates between law and grace. And he's going to use the one man the Judaizers were certainly heralding as their champion for the keeping of the law. And that man is Abraham. And yet, Paul counters this.

GAL 3:6 "Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

Paul is going to make the case that, as important as Abraham was in obeying God through his works, those works were not the means to Abraham's righteousness, but rather they were the outworking of his faith.

And this is brilliant on Paul's part because the Judaizers were certainly pointing to Abraham as their case in point for why these Galatian believers needed to be circumcised. Keep in mind that the Judaizers were trying to compel the believers, or to force these believers, to become circumcised to complete their salvation.

Their reasoning was that if you are to share in the blessings of Abraham then you must do the works of Abraham. And one of the most prominent works of Abraham was to obey God in becoming circumcised.

You'll remember that Abraham was the first to become circumcised at the command of God for the specific reason of being identified as a child of God according to the covenant God made with Abraham. There were certainly other ancient cultures who used circumcision but not in the same way as did Abraham and his descendants.

GEN 17:10-11 "This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you."

The Judaizers would certainly point to this passage and tell these Galatians, "see, if Abraham, the father of God's people, needed to be circumcised, then you, who have now been allowed to share in the faith of the Jews through the blessing of Abraham, also need to be circumcised."

In an odd sort of way it made all the sense in their world. Abraham is our spiritual father. He was circumcised. We follow in his ways as spiritual children of God and must also be circumcised. But Paul comes along and points out that it was not circumcision which made Abraham righteous before God.

And this is where Paul brings the written word of God to bear on this issue as he takes the Galatians back to the Scriptures they had in their possession. This of course would have been the O.T. Scriptures. He takes them to Genesis.

GEN 15:4-6 Then the word of the LORD came to [Abram]: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars - if indeed you can count them." Then

he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness."

This is what Paul is quoting in this letter to the Galatians. He is pointing out that when Abram was approached by God this was the promise the Lord gave to him as he covenanted to bless Abram.

Abram could respond in one of two ways. He could take what he heard and go on his merry way without following the Lord, or he could believe God and follow the Lord wherever He led. Abram chose to believe God. And the result was that the Lord credited Abram with righteousness.

In using Abraham as the supreme example of what makes men righteous before God, the Judaizers left themselves open to allowing the Scriptures to determine when Abraham was declared righteous by God.

And Paul simply says, check the Scriptures out for yourselves. The word of God tells us that when Abraham was about 76 years old he was given the covenant promise from God that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the heavens. At that point Abraham believed God at His word and we're told that God declared him righteous.

It wasn't until ten years later when Abraham was 86 years old that Ishmael was born to him. It would be thirteen years after this when God instructed Abraham to circumcise himself and Ishmael along with every other male in his company.

And so, Paul's point stands. Was Abraham declared righteous when he believed God, or was Abraham declared righteous when he was circumcised 23 years later?

The answer is obvious according to the Scriptures. "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

Abraham became a child of God when he believed, not when he performed some physical rite to cut off the foreskin of his flesh. And so, to follow the teachings of these Judaizers, who were telling the Galatians that to be a true child of God like Abraham they had to be circumcised, was to show that the Judaizers were not following the word of God and thus they were teaching heresy.

Paul takes the same Abraham these Judaizers were putting on a pedestal, as the model for righteousness before God, and simply taught God's word on the issue by showing that God accepted

Abraham on one basis, and one basis only; believe on the Lord and His promises and you will be saved.

This has not changed since the beginning of time. After Adam and Eve sinned against God they were cut off from His love and fellowship. It wasn't until after God gave them a promise that He would send a Savior through the seed of the woman that mankind could be reconciled back to the Lord. Adam and Eve believed that God would do this and this was credited to them as righteousness. This is why you and I will one day see both Adam and Eve in heaven.

They believed the Lord and they trusted that He would fulfill this promise made to them. And of course we know that He did fulfill this promise when the seed of the woman came to fruition when the Son of God became flesh, born of the virgin Mary. This by the way, is the same seed spoken of when referred to as the seed of Abraham.

In fact, this is precisely what Paul will tell these same Galatians a little later in this chapter.

GAL 3:16 "The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ."

But back to our text.

GAL 3:7 "Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham."

This particular doctrine completely undercut the teachings of the Judaizers who said that only Jews had the real advantage when it came to having God as their Father, as they enjoyed the fellowship of God as His children.

Paul is saying that anyone who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ is a child of Abraham in the same sense that when Abraham believed the Lord he became a child of God.

And the reason Paul uses this expression "children of Abraham" is because at this point he is addressing the Jews who were trying to add the law to the grace of God. In this way Paul is teaching that whether you're a Jew or not, unless you have the same faith of Abraham you are not a child of Abraham.

This is precisely what Jesus taught the Jews of His day who tried to reason that since they were physical descendants of Abraham that somehow that gave them entrance to their heavenly Father. Jesus sets them straight.

JOH 8:37-40 "I know you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word. I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you do what you have heard from your father." "Abraham is our father," they answered. "If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would do the things Abraham did. As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. You are doing the things your own father does." "We are not illegitimate children," they protested. "The only Father we have is God himself." You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies."

Do you know what kind of a blow that was to the Jews of Christ's day? Jesus essentially told them that they are not children of God, no matter who they were descended from. Unless they did the things of Abraham, and by this Jesus meant believed on the Lord as did Abraham, they only had one father who was the devil himself.

Paul makes the same point when writing to the Christians in Rome.

ROM 4:8-12 "Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him." Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised."

And so, Paul is saying, whether you're a Gentile or a Jew, unless you have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ you are not a

descendant of Abraham, in the spiritual sense, since Abraham became a child of God by faith, not through some work such as circumcision.

In fact, Paul goes a step further when he wrote this in Romans.

ROM 2:28-29 "A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code."

Do you realize that in a very real sense you and I are spiritual Jews? Why? Because we are Jews inwardly because our circumcision is one which is inward; a cutting away of the sinful man and the penalty of death, and having it replaced with a new nature and life which only God can give us by faith in Christ. We have a circumcision of the heart, and it was God who did the circumcision from above.

Abraham performed his own circumcision of the flesh. But long before that circumcision Abraham had also been circumcised in his heart by God Himself. Abraham's outward circumcision of the flesh was just a symbol of what God had already done in Abraham's heart as He gave him a promise of life.

This life was never intended by God to be limited to the Jews.

GAL 3:8 "The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you."

There is the common misconception that only the Jews were meant to have a relationship with God since they were specially chosen by God. This simply isn't the case. Before the nation of Israel ever existed there were many people coming to faith in God, as I said earlier, going back as far as Adam and Eve.

Adam and Eve were not considered Jews, nor was Seth their third son or any other descendant of Adam and Eve right up to the time of Abraham. But Paul's point in verse 8 has to do with those who came after Abraham and the promises which were given to him.

Again, keep in mind that Paul is addressing Jews who were trying to coerce Gentile believers into becoming circumcised according to the practice given to Abraham.

And Paul's point is that this promise that was given to Abraham was not meant to only be limited to the physical descendants of

Abraham. This was universal in scope. Unfortunately, the Gentiles rejected the God of the Jews as they tried to destroy the Jewish nation.

But also, it was unfortunate that the Jews as a nation did not take their responsibility seriously as God meant for them to be a light and a beacon to the Gentile world as they were to encourage the Gentiles to look to the God of the Jews as their Savior.

There is no more clear a teaching on this than in the book of Jonah, who was a Jew, and seemed to represent the sentiment of the Jews toward the Gentiles at that time.

JON 1:1-3 "The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me." But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD."

God saw the wickedness of Ninevah and chose Jonah to preach to them that they could be saved out of God's judgment as they would be encouraged to repent and turn to the living God of the Jews by faith.

Jonah understood exactly what God wanted to do. Finally, but reluctantly, he preached to Ninevah to repent, and they did. The result was that they did not suffer the wrath of God as they turned to the Lord for deliverance.

JON 3:10 "When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened."

Well, you would think that Jonah would rejoice in the fact that His God extended mercy to those outside of Israel, and that His God also could love the Gentile world. But that was not the way Jonah felt.

JON 4:1-4;11 "But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He prayed to the LORD, "O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now, O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live." But the LORD replied, "Have you any right to be angry?"... Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty

thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?"

That's the way the book of Jonah ends. It shows us that the scope of God's redemption is not limited to one particular people but rather to all people's of the world as He has chosen a people for Himself from all nations.

God gave Abraham the promise of good news to foreshadow the promise which was meant for all men. Keep in mind that when Abraham was called out by God he would have been considered a Gentile himself.

The nation of Israel, made up of Jews, would not come about until many years later when Abraham's grandson, Jacob, had a son named Joseph who was sold into slavery and ended up in Egypt where he ruled with Pharaoh because of the famine, and eventually was allowed to bring his family to Egypt to join him.

This is when the nation of Israel came into being as they had grown in numbers to where they could be seen as a powerful separate people in the midst of the Egyptians. In fact, God was continually showing mercy and compassion toward the Gentile Egyptians during that famine as the blessing of Joseph was extended to the entire nation of Egypt.

But through the promise given to Abraham it clearly shows that God intended for the Gentiles to share in the blessings of Abraham to the degree that they share in the eternal inheritance by faith; the same blessing the writer of Hebrews refers to.

HEB 11:9-10 "By faith [Abraham] made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God."

All Gentiles who come to God by faith in Christ also look forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God."

In other words, we look forward to being with God in heaven as we ultimately share in His new heavens and new earth.

But notice how Paul identifies what God does for the Gentiles in our text.

Verse 8 - "The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith..."

To justify means to declare one to be righteous according to the justice that God demands. And so, Paul is saying that the Gentiles would be given the same righteousness given to Abraham which was received by faith, not by works of the law.

The Scriptures announced this or predicted this in prophetic language when the Lord told Abraham that "All nations will be blessed through you."

Abraham was given the good news of eternal life and he embraced it by faith. We have the good news found in Christ who secured our eternal life by dying for the penalty of our sins. But only as we embrace it by faith, as did Abraham, will we ever enter into the presence and rest found in Christ alone.

HEB 3:15-19 "As has just been said: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion." Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief."

Many of the Jews who came out of Egypt did not enter into the Promised land because of their unbelief. Only those who originally came out of Egypt and believed on the Lord, along with their descendants, entered the land.

HEB 4:1-2 Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.

We are saved by grace through faith alone in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

GAL 3:9 "So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith."

Abraham is not known as the man of circumcision, but the man of faith. It was his faith that embraced the promises of God along with the commands of God, one of which was circumcision.

Obedience followed faith, not the other way around. And for these Judaizers to reverse the order is to put salvation on its head. One can add nothing to the finished work of Christ and call it salvation. It's just another form of trying to earn your way to heaven. And we are clearly told that nothing outside of Christ's shed blood can accomplish our salvation.

ROM 5:9-11 "Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation."

Most of us here are probably Gentiles by birth. But in Christ we are Abraham's spiritual offspring since he is our spiritual father having believed the promises of God.

EPH 2:11-14;19-20 Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men) remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone."

Let me end with a benediction or a blessing from God's word which is meant to encourage our hearts.

HEB 13:20 "May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, 21 equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."