

“Faith Like Abraham’s”

February 6, 2011

Text: Galatians 3:6-9

The most important men in the OT were men through-whom and with-whom God formed covenants=> e.g. Abraham/Moses/David.

Of these, Abraham is arguably the most important, because God said to him=> *“In you **all** the families of the earth will be blessed.”*

In Isa 41:8, the Lord referred to Abraham as *“My friend,”*—a title of great honor given to no one else in the entire Bible.

The Israelites called themselves the “seed of Abraham.”

You hear their reverence for him in the words of Korah.

Psa 47:9=> *“The princes of the people have assembled themselves as the people of the God of **Abraham.**”*

God blessed the Israelites as a nation, because of His covenant with their patriarch, Abraham.

He told them (Isa 51:2)=> *“Look to the rock from which you were hewn, & to the quarry from which you were dug. / Look to **Abraham** your father.”*

Unfortunately, the Jews had added a false notion to what God had said about His blessing their nation for Abraham’s sake=>

They taught that God would save individual Jewish souls simply because they were natural descendants of Abraham.

That was not true, as we’ll see in our study of Galatians today.

We are examining the NT book of Galatians, which can be neatly divided into 3 sections, of 2 chapters each.

The 1st section (Gal 1 & 2) is *personal*.

Paul is defending himself as an apostle, against the slanderous lies of some men called Judaizers.

Judaizers were Jews who had claimed to become Xns, but who had simply modified their old Jewish beliefs.

They were Xns in name only.

The Judaizers had come to Galatia after Paul left there, and had attacked both Paul/his-gospel-of-grace thru faith.

The 2nd section (Gal 3 & 4) is *doctrinal*.

The Judaizers had taught the Gentile believers of Galatia a false doctrine that in order to become really saved, they had to do more than believe in Jesus=>

They also had to become Jews, by being circumcised and keeping the whole Mosaic Law.

This is the section we are just beginning, where Paul is defending his doctrine of salvation thru faith alone, apart from good works or religious deeds (such as circumcision & obedience to the Law).

In the 3rd section (Gal 5 & 6), Paul will emphasize the *application* of the doctrinal truths he has taught in sections 1 & 2.

Last Sunday we saw that Paul began the doctrinal section of his letter by asking the Galatians 5 questions relating to their own experiences as believers.

The first 4 questions were designed to stimulate their thinking and to make them realize that they had been saved on the basis of their faith, not because of any good/religious deeds they had ever done.

The concluding 5th question summarized this point=>

*“Does **He** then [God], who provides you with the Spirit [who saves you through the power of the Spirit] and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?” (Gal 3:5).*

By this time, Paul’s readers should have been able to answer w/o hesitation=>

“We were saved as we heard the gospel w/ faith when it was proclaimed to us—certainly not by our works!”

In today’s text (Gal 3:6-9), Paul quotes OT Scripture to prove that Abraham (the Jews’ original patriarch), like everyone else who has ever been justified before God, was saved through faith alone; specifically=>

*that God saved Abraham because he believed Him;

*that God saves Gentiles who believe as Abraham did;

*and that God saves anyone/everyone who believes.

*** God Saved Abraham Because He Believed**

Paul quotes the OT to show that God has always saved and justified people, because of their faith in Him.

I.e., it’s through their faith that they become acceptable to God.

[Galatians 3:6]=> *“Even so [since God saves people who believe the message heard, not by the works of the Law (as we saw last time)] Abraham BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.”*

The Judaizers had prob. claimed that you had to be racially linked to Abraham in order to become justified.

If you weren’t born a Jew, you had to make yourself a Jew through circumcision & obedience to Moses’ Law.

I.e., performing a religious rite would make you “acceptable to God.”

Paul says the example of Abraham proves the opposite=>

That people are saved by faith, not by religious-rites or good works.
In Rom 4:9-10, Paul pointed out that Abraham himself believed & was saved, long before he was circumcised, because God credited his faith to him as righteousness.
He was justified & made acceptable to God because of his faith, even though he hadn't yet been circumcised, and wouldn't be until many years later.

Notice the nature/character of Abraham's faith in God.

We see it here in our text's quotation from Gen 15:6=> "*Abraham BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.*"

The question is=> What did he believe God for?

The answer to that is found in Gen 12:2, where God promised to make a great nation out of Abraham, by giving him many descendants.

In Gen 13:16, God elaborated, even saying He would make Abraham's descendants as numerous as the dust on the ground.

But Abraham didn't even have 1 son yet, and he was already 90 years old. Moreover, Sarah (his wife) was long past her child-bearing years, and had always been barren anyway.

So Abraham questioned God, wondering how He could fulfill His promise & give him so many descendants.

God answered Abraham's question with another promise in=>

Gen 15:5=> "*'Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.'* And He said to him, '*So shall your descendants be.*'"

Gen 15:6 (the verse quoted in our text) is Abraham's response=> "*Then he **believed** in the Lord [not just His answer, but His character], and He [God] reckoned it to him as righteousness.*"

Abraham wasn't believing God for his own salvation;

He was simply trusting God to give him the son God had promised.

But the point was=> He did believe God, trusting Him, & operating on the assumption that he could rely on the Lord to do what He had promised He would do.

In spite of the improbability of it all, Abraham chose to set aside his doubt, & cast his hopes on God's faithfulness.

That is the faith that saves.

You may look at yourself/your-sin and think, "It's not likely that God would save me."

But if you can set aside your doubt and choose to simply trust Him, He will save you, as He did Abraham, who "*hoped against hope*" (Rom 4:18).

Although Abraham's faith in God to give him a son was what God reckoned as righteousness, justifying his soul, Abraham also demonstrated his faith in other ways.

Heb 11:8=> *"By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going."*

The man was 75 years old, but he didn't even know his destination or anything about the land to which he was going.

But by his faith in God, he obeyed/went-out to an alien land where he would be a foreigner, living in a tent the rest of his life.

Heb 11:10=> *"For he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God."*

He believed that his ultimate Promised Land would be heaven, which he would inherit.

In addition, Abraham believed in the coming Messiah.

In Jn 8:56, Jesus said=> *"Your father **Abraham** rejoiced to see **My** day, and he saw it and was glad."*

But the act of faith for which God actually reckoned him righteousness, (and because of which He saved Abraham's soul) was his simply believing that, despite the odds, God would give him the son for whom he longed, & whom God had promised him.

"Reckoned" means to accredit something to someone's account.

God accredited the perfect righteousness of X to Abraham, giving him credit for it, as if it were his own.

Why did God do that for Abraham?

Because he had believed God's promise to give him a son.

God saved Abraham simply because he had believed Him.

Please notice a couple of principles from the example of Abraham, and take them to heart=>

* Abraham wasn't justified by his good deeds.

He had done many good deeds, such as leaving his country and kindred when God called him, giving his nephew Lot his choice of lands on which to graze his flocks, refusing the spoils of Sodom after defeating an alliance of kings, building altars to worship God, & giving the priest Melchizedek a tithe of all he owned.

But God didn't justify him because of these good deeds.

If God didn't save Abraham for his good deeds, what about the rest of us, who don't do very many good deeds?

What about the thief on the cross who was being executed for having done evil deeds?

We're all saved for the same reason, and that, despite the fact that none of us deserves it=> God graciously saves us when we simply believe Him. Afterward, we all think to ourselves, "I don't deserve this, I should do more."

But there's nothing more to do, but accept His gracious gift and be grateful. It's easier to believe God could save you when you've just done something good.

But the real test is to believe, when you've done something bad, that Jesus really is the Savior of sinners—not saints.

* Abraham wasn't justified because of his religious deeds either.

From the Jews' perspective, he prob. should at least have gotten himself circumcised and obeyed Moses' Law (if it had existed back then).

But God didn't ask him to do either of these, because that might have given him the impression that doing so had "earned" him his salvation (making God's grace irrelevant).

By the same token, God doesn't tell us to become baptized for our salvation, nor to undergo confirmation, nor even to take Communion.

He simply tells us, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved" (Acts 16:31).

There's nothing more to do after that.

If we do any of these things thinking we're "firming up" our likelihood of salvation, we nullify God's grace, disannul our salvation, and insult God.

Our joy is simply to stand there like grateful beggars, living God.

Abraham was reckoned righteous because of his faith alone, and so must you/I be.

Rom 4:5=> *"To the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness."*

* **God Saves Gentiles Who Believe**

This is the point towards which Paul has been working.

The Judaizers may have argued that God's blessing on Abraham was due to his obedience (circumcision & intuitive observance of the Law).

When Paul showed them from Gen 15:6 that it was due only to his faith, there wasn't much they could reply.

But now Paul expands the concept of justification through faith alone, to include others who believe God, as Abraham did.

He calls them *"sons of Abraham."*

[Verse 7]=> *"Therefore, be sure that it is those who are **of faith** who are **sons of Abraham.**"*

Those who are “of faith” are controlled & directed by their faith, so that their whole lives become characterized by their faith.

Faith becomes the guiding principle of their lives, just as it was for Abraham.

Paul calls people like this “*sons of Abraham*” because they behave like Abraham, act on their faith like Abraham, & so they share Abraham’s character, a/w/a his eternal hope.

Jesus used this same metaphor in Jn 8:39, telling the Jews who claimed to be sons of Abraham=> “*If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham.*”

Paul is expanding on what he’s already said about Abraham, to show that only believers have a legitimate claim to be the spiritual children of Abraham.

The Judaizers argued that they were descendants of Abraham.

As far as their lineage was concerned, that was prob. true.

But they weren’t the spiritual descendants of Abraham.

And the circumcision they urged on Gentiles had no spiritual merit or effect at all that would make them “sons of Abraham” either.

In fact, Rom 2 says that spiritually, people like the Judaizers weren’t even really Jews.

Rom 2:28-29=> “*He is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. / But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter.*”

On the other hand, anyone who believes God, whether he happens to be Jewish/Gentile, is a “son of Abraham.”

And like Abraham, he is reckoned by God to be righteous on the basis of his faith alone.

Believers, not do-gooders, are imitators of Abraham’s conduct/faith, & they’re the true heirs of his blessings.

What do they believe?

They believe that God will do for them what He has promised to do, through the atoning death of Jesus X.

II Cor 5:19=> “*Namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them.*”

Being free of the Law’s condemnation is the blessing God has promised to those who believe as Abraham did (i.e., justification).

Verse 7 states the general truth, that the “sons of Abraham” include those who believe as Abraham did.

Verse 8 specifically applies this truth to those who aren't Jewish, but Gentile, as Paul continues to chip away at the Judaizers' arguments.

[Verse 8]=> *“And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the **Gentiles** by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘ALL THE NATIONS SHALL BE BLESSED IN YOU.’”*

Strangely, Paul personifies “the Scripture” here, saying that it “foresaw” something that God would do.

What he means is that God (the Author of Scripture) foresaw what He would do, because He had determined to do it.

By attributing this foresight to Scripture, Paul means that God recorded His purpose to justify Gentiles in such a way that, through prophetic Scripture, we could vicariously witness its fulfillment.

The thing “foreseen” is the fact that God would justify Gentiles (declare them righteous) by their faith, just as He had justified Abraham because of his faith.

Having foreseen that fact, God “preached the gospel beforehand.”

He gave Abraham a preview of the gospel we preach today, telling him that it would someday be preached to “*all the nations*”—not just Jews, but Gentiles as well.

God informed Abraham not only about the coming Messiah who would save sinners through His death, but also that those sinners would be saved/justified by their faith, just as Abraham himself had been.

This would make them “sons of Abraham.”

The statement “*all the nations shall be blessed in you*” is a quotation from Gen 12:3.

The Lord was intimating to Abraham that, like himself, future generations of Gentiles would be justified by faith.

But in their case, they would believe in His Son's atoning death, the details of which hadn't yet been revealed to Abraham.

That prophecy was now being fulfilled to a great extent through Paul's ministry to Gentiles like the Galatians.

God had told Abraham “*the nations shall be blessed in you,*”

* meaning both “through you,” because the Savior will be born into this world through your loins;

* But also meaning “in identifying with you, Abraham, & with your faith,” and therefore getting in on the eternal blessing given to you through God's covenant to you=> justification.

Taking all this together, what does it mean?

That God saves Gentiles who believe His promises, just as He saved Abraham when he believed God's promise.

*** God Saves Anyone and Everyone who Believes**

Having broadened the idea of Abraham's salvation through faith by applying it to Gentiles, Paul now states it as a general principle applying to all men & women.

Let's summarize=>

- * Verse 7 showed that those who are "*of faith*" are sons of Abe.
- * Verse 8 showed that "in Abraham" his spiritual sons from all the Gentile nations on earth will receive the blessing of justification.
- * Now verse 9 forms the conclusion=> all believers are justified w/ Abe.

[Verse 9]=> "*So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.*"

In Rom 4, Paul makes the same point more directly (4:22-25)=> "*Therefore also IT [Abe's faith] WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. / Now not for his sake only was it written, that it was reckoned to him, / but for our sake also, to whom it will be reckoned, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, / He who was delivered up because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.*"

The principle: Those who place their faith in God's sacrifice of His Son are reckoned righteous before God, in spite of their sins.

- * They trust in Him to forgive/cover/cleanse their sins through Jesus' atoning death;
- * They trust God's guarantee that Jesus' resurrection means He has justified/declared-them-righteous.
- * They have been freed from condemnation, through their faith.
- * They are "*blessed*" to become recipients of all God's love/mercy/grace, bestowed on those who are "in X" through faith.

If they are Gentiles, seeking to become Jewish thru circumcision would gain them nothing, but would, in fact, nullify their faith in God's grace alone for salvation.

They would then be seeking justification in some way other than the one by which God justified Abraham;

And by some way totally different from the one God foretold as the means of Gentile justification.

God saves anyone/everyone who believes in Jesus X for salvation from his sin, but He saves no one who doesn't.

I suspect some of you are saved, but don't really understand your salvation, & are therefore afraid that words like "*accepted in the Beloved*" don't truly apply to you.

Comparing your faith with Abraham's seemingly perfect faith, you consider your faith too weak/paltry to do you any good or to be recognized by God.

At times, Abraham's faith was indeed exemplary/impressive.

E.g. in Rom 4:19-21, we read=> *“Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; / yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, / and being fully assured that what He had promised, He was able also to perform.”*

But that's not the whole story, and at times Abe's faith did waver.

* It wavered when he asked Sarah to deceive the Egyptians into thinking she was only his sister.

Unwavering faith would have trusted God to protect him, & not asked his wife to lie.

* His faith also wavered when he sought the son God had promised by going into Hagar—Sarah's handmaid, so she could serve as a surrogate mother.

Abraham's faith wasn't perfect, & yours doesn't need to be either.

Jesus said that if you/I have faith the size of a tiny mustard seed, we can move mountains.

Our faith doesn't have to match that of a great/mature saint.

God responds even to the faith of a little child.

Even simple faith, if it sincerely trusts God's promise to save those who believe in X, is saving faith.

Another misunderstanding from which Xns often suffer is that their faith, in/of itself, is what saves them.

We don't trust our faith to save us, any more than we trust our good works, our religious deeds, our love for God, or our desires for holiness, to save us.

We trust X alone to save us, so we put our faith in Him.

Our faith is simply the handle by which we hold on to X.

That faith, by its very nature, places the focus on Him, and directs the spotlight away from ourselves.

Rom 5:19=> *“As through the 1 man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so thru the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.”*

We look by faith to X's righteous obedience to save us, but we don't put confidence in our own faith itself, for our salvation.

God imputes His righteousness to us when we believe, but our believing is not a meritorious act of righteousness, by which we “earn” God's grace/acceptance.

That means our faith doesn't have to be perfect, nor does it have to be as strong as that of a glorified saint to save us.

Jesus alone is perfect, we believe in Him w/ imperfect, simple faith—
whether it's strong or weak—and that's enough.

We can safely rest in His perfect power to save us.

The power in a medicine can heal an invalid, whether/not his hand shakes
with weakness as he places the pill in his mouth.

His weakness doesn't affect the strength of the medication at all.

Our faith simply grasps what Jesus accomplished for us on the cross, holding on to
that for dear life with whatever strength we have, relying on Him, not us.

As Lidie Edmunds put it in her beautiful/familiar hymn=>

My faith has found a resting place

Not in device or creed:

I trust the Ever-living One

His wounds for me shall plead.

Enough for me that Jesus saves

This ends my fear & doubt;

A sinful soul, I come to Him

He'll never cast me out.

I need no other argument, I need no other plea;

It is enough that Jesus died, & that He died for me.