**CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM**

**GALATIANS 3:6-22**

I wrapped up last week’s lesson by asking, “Aren't you glad that your salvation is by grace and not by works? Aren't you glad that you don't earn your salvation? Aren't you glad that keeping your salvation doesn't depend on what you do or don't do?”

In today’s lesson Paul is going to use the O.T. to drive home his main point that salvation is by grace thru faith and not by works. Nobody is saved, justified, made right with God by keeping the Mosaic Law or any other set of rules. Paul is going to point out that justification has always been by faith even in the O.T. From Galatians 3:6 thru Galatians 4:7 Paul defends his doctrine of justification by faith on the basis of the O.T. scriptures. He quotes from the O.T. and explains what those scriptures teach and how they apply to believers in Jesus Christ. This is classic Paul…

*[discuss cover slide – Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac (age 15?) came 30 years after Genesis 15:6, Abrahamic covenant, the verse Paul quotes]*

Abraham is a great biblical example of faith. You could say that he’s sort of the “Father of Faith.” More verses in Heb 11 about him than anyone else. All who follow in his kind of faith – those who believe that God can do the impossible and then step out by their obedience to do what God says to do – these are spiritual children of Abraham.

READ Galatians 3:6-9

Paul points to Abraham's salvation experience. If works could save, then they must have saved Abraham, the great patriarch of the Jews. The main argument of the Jewish legalistic false teachers (aka the Judaizers) who had brainwashed the Galatian Christians was that the Gentiles had to adopt Jewish practices in order to become Christians. Paul exposed the flaw in their argument by showing that real children of Abraham are those who have faith, not those who keep the Law.

Paul quotes Genesis 15:6, “And he believed the LORD, and He [God] counted it to him [Abraham] as righteousness.” What did Abraham do to become righteous? Very simply, he believed God, God’s promise to him. He had faith! One of the false teachings which had permeated the Galatian churches was that one had to be circumcised in order to be saved. Based on this passage in Genesis, circumcision was not a requirement. You see, Abraham was circumcised 14 years after Genesis 15:6. That means that circumcision had absolutely NOTHING to do with Abraham being declared righteous!

Paul says, v 7, “Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.” So, in a spiritual sense, you and I are the children of Abraham. Did you realize that? No, we’re not the physical offspring of Abraham. I’m not a Jew or an Arab (physical descendants of Abraham). I’m a Gentile by birth with European ancestry, but I AM a child of Abraham spiritually.

Paul also quotes Genesis 12:3, “I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” That little phrase “in you” refers to Abraham's seed. How is it that all the earth will be blessed? Thru the Messiah, thru Jesus who is a direct descendant of Abraham. Based on God’s unconditional promise to Abraham, all the nations of the world, not just the Jews, will be blessed. “For God so loved the world, that He gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16) Abraham believed by faith looking FORWARD to God's promise. We believe by faith looking BACK at God's fulfillment of that promise. In God's calling of Abraham way back in Genesis was the promise that Gentiles would be saved as Gentiles. We don't have to become Jews. We don't have to get circumcised. They don't have to keep all the ceremony and the law. All we have to do is, like Father Abraham, believe God and it will be counted to us, KJV “reckoned” as righteousness.

READ Galatians 3:10

For those in the Galatian churches depending on keeping the Jewish law as a requirement for salvation, Paul reminds them of what the O.T. says. This time he quotes Deuteronomy 27:26: says, “Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.” The law condemns those who don't keep ALL of it. These were the words spoken by Moses to the people of Israel. In reply, the people said to Moses, “Amen.” In other words, “we agree to these terms.”

A person who accepts the law as the way of salvation has to stand or fall on the basis of the law. Paul says, “If you want to live by law, the law will curse you.” Why does he say that? Because God’s covenant people were commanded to abide by all things written in the law. Instead of being blessed by being put under the law, they were cursed. Romans 4:15 says, “for the Law brings wrath.” Anyone who wants to live under legalism binds himself to live under to the whole law. If you think you can save yourself by doing anything; if you think you have to perform some works to earn your salvation, then you place yourself under all its requirements, not part.

By the way, you will find no verse in the Bible that speaks of the law saving or justifying a person. We know as a point of fact that the law did not justify Abraham or Isaac or Jacob or Joseph or any of those O.T. patriarchs. We know this because they all lived prior to God giving the law on Mount Sinai. Even after the law was given it could not justify someone before God. Why not? Because nobody is able to keep the law perfectly. The Law only condemns. It cannot save anyone. The purpose of the Law (we mentioned this last week) was to show people that they were sinners and, therefore, that they needed a Savior.

READ Galatians 3:11

Here Paul cites Habakkuk 2:4 which says, “Behold, his soul is puffed up [proud]; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.” How fitting that this entire verse actually contrasts the proud with the righteous. The legalistic false teachers strutted around -- “Look at us! Be like us. We do all these good things.” But none of their so-called good deeds could save them. And our righteousness is not the result of our good deeds either. However…

READ Galatians 3:12

“The Law is not of faith” means that faith and law are opposite. To use a math term they are “mutually exclusive.” They do not go together. For example, you are either married or single. You are either male or female. You are not both. You are one age. For me that would be 61 and only 61. Not any other age. Similarly, salvation by faith and salvation by works are mutually exclusive.

Paul quotes another Old Testament scripture, Leviticus 18:5 which says, “You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD.” Be careful. If you keep the law perfectly you will live, but if you break one single law, then you violate everything and will die. Seeking justification by keeping the law is like a cold glass of lemonade laced with cyanide. It may initially satisfy and refresh you, but ultimately it will kill you.

Paul offers a glorious remedy for such desperate people seeking to be justified before a holy God. We cannot achieve self-righteousness. We cannot make ourselves right before God. The legalistic false teachers were wrong. Circumcision, ritual, ceremony, all that stuff won’t do it. Then how will it happen? How can we come to God? How can we be made righteous? Tell us, Paul!

READ Galatians 3:13

Here it is! This is good news! “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law...” How did He do that? “…By becoming a curse for us on the cross.” He took our place. The crucifixion brought Jesus under the curse of the Law as stated in Deuteronomy 21:23, “for a hanged man is cursed by God.” In ancient Israel, criminals sentenced to death and executed were to be hung on trees as symbols of God's judgment (like what happened to Saul’s 7 sons which we saw in our study of 2 Samuel). What does that have to do with us? Well, because we committed sins that warrant a spiritual death sentence. But God in His mercy offers to spare us!

Think back to the story of Jesus’ crucifixion. Who was it that was supposed to be crucified instead of Jesus? Barabbas. He was a criminal that ended up being released at the crowds urging. Well, we are like Barabbas. We get released while Jesus takes our rightful place on the cross. Did Barabbas deserve mercy? No. He was a ruthless thug. Well, we don’t deserve mercy either. Our guilt and punishment were transferred to Christ, the innocent one. And His death freed us from the curse of the Law. We can add nothing to what Jesus did. We simply accept His offer of mercy or we reject it. There is no in-between response. “Maybe” is not an option.

The Christian author John Stott says this: “Faith is laying hold of Jesus Christ personally. There is no merit in it. It is not another work. Its value is not in itself, but entirely in its object, Jesus Christ.”

READ Galatians 3:14

It doesn't matter who you are. All you have to do is believe in Christ Jesus. Place your faith in Him.

The Galatian Christian's adoption of “another gospel” as Paul put it back in Chap 1, a perverted doctrine – it had re-enslaved them. They were missing the joy of their salvation. They were like hostages who had been rescued from a group of terrorists. Instead of enjoying their newfound freedom and all the benefits that it afforded them, they slipped back to the place of their captivity to a life of bitter confinement.

Well, at this point the false teachers' response to the point Paul is making might have been something like this: “OK, Paul, all that you’re saying about God’s promise to Abraham may be well and good, but that only applied until the law came. Once the law was given it replaced the promise of faith God made to Abraham. Now you had to live by the law in order to be saved.” Well Paul refutes this false notion in v 15…

READ Galatians 3:15

Human covenants, such as a validated will or contract, are legally binding. However, they can be changed. They can even be contested. Human parties often revise their agreements. But a promise made by an unchanging and eternal God will not change. Once God makes a promise, whether conditional or unconditional, He stands by it forever. God keeps His word. No earthly judge has the authority to overrule Him. Therefore, God is not going to make a promise to Abraham and then change it up later on when Moses arrives on the scene. Paul's argument is, “No, the law cannot come in and annul the first promise made to Abraham, because that was confirmed by God. No one can change that.”

READ Galatians 3:16

God poured out His blessing upon the world through Abraham's seed, singular, namely Jesus Christ. What was His blessing to all the nations? Salvation, eternal life, the forgiveness of sins, through faith in Christ. God's promise was not just to Abraham and the Jewish nation, but to the entire world.

All of human history goes like this: the O.T. looks forward to the cross, the N.T. look back at the cross. The cross of Christ is the focal point of all history. Jesus Christ died for the sins of the whole world, sins past, present and future. Could the blood of bulls and goats take away sin? No. Were the O.T. saints sanctified by the blood of bulls and goats? No. They were sanctified the same way we are, by the blood of Jesus Christ, which had not yet been shed. And when it was finally was shed at Calvary, Jesus’ blood covered all sins from both sides of the cross. It is only as a man, by faith, accepts the redemptive work of Christ for him personally, that he is placed by God in Christ. Only then can he be blessed.

READ Galatians 3:17-18

God's promise to Abraham was unconditional – no strings attached. So, when the Law came along 430 years later, it did not nullify the promise that God made to Abraham. God's faith promise and God's law existed side by side, totally independent of each other.

Paul says in verse 18 that we are either going to be justified by promise of faith or by works of the law, not both. And remember, Abraham was justified by promise of faith. The law came along much later.

In v 18 Paul mentions “the inheritance.” Can you earn an inheritance? No. It’s a gift. Generally it is given to someone because of their relationship with the giver. It’s not something one earns by good works. It’s a free gift. And so it is with our salvation. It is our inheritance from the Lord Himself. We receive it because of our relationship with Jesus Christ.

READ Galatians 3:19

The law was given to make wrongdoing a legal offense. Was there sin before the law was given? Sure there was! There has been sin ever since the Garden of Eden. But the law was not only given to show man that he was a sinner. He already knew that he had sinned. The law was given to show man, not only that he was a sinner, but also that he was willfully breaking the standards of God, rebelling against the holiness of God.

The law showed us our sin and our depravity, but it could not remove it. The Law clearly defined what was moral and immoral, what was godly and what was ungodly. Prior to the Law all people had to guide them was their own conscience. After the Law was given, sin was no longer a matter of one man's opinion against another's, but a divinely established fact.

Notice that phrase in v 19, “until the offspring should come.” It reveals that the Law was given for the interval between the time of Moses and the time of Christ. Abraham's seed finally came, didn’t He? John 1:17 says, “For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.” So the Law was only temporary, until the seed, Jesus, came. The law was supposed to show us what rotten sinners we are, living in violation of a holy God’s perfect standards. When we see ourselves against this backdrop, we are convicted that we are sinners in need of help. So the law was given to show us that we have all sinned against almighty God and need a deliverer, a savior, a forgiver, salvation from the judgment of God to come. It had only a temporary purpose in that sense. It pointed us to Jesus Christ. Later in this chapter Paul would declare that “the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ…”

READ Galatians 3:20

A mediator is a go-between. God's promise to Abraham was done without a mediator. God dealt directly with Abraham. Basically God told Abraham, “Here it is. I’m giving it to you. Take it. It’s a free gift.” God gave the Law to Moses with the angels and Moses acting as mediators between God and the people of Israel. God said, “Here it is, I'll do this, but only if you do this.” That was the Law. This is exactly the position of those who negotiate an agreement or contract with a mediator. Each party is required to do certain things. This is another supporting argument by Paul as to why the covenant promise with Abraham was superior to the Law given to Moses. One was unconditional. One was conditional.

READ Galatians 3:21

Do God's laws and God's promises contradict each other? Paul's answer is "of course not!" If the law could save us, as the false teachers had claimed, then God would not have had to give us a different way to escape the clutches of sin and its devastating result. If the law could save us, then righteousness would indeed have been based on the law.

READ Galatians 3:22

What did God give us? He provided a way of escape from the end result of sin. The law, revealing man's sin before a holy God and, therefore, the need for a savior, actually drove man to the promise of salvation by faith. The law had its purpose. Paul tells the Galatians, “The promise of faith is still in order. It is superior. Don't let anyone add to it or change it.” And what was true in Paul’s day is still true today. God has not changed anything. He is still redeeming people today by faith just as He did with Abraham. If you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, you can know forgiveness and righteousness in Him. That’s what our hope is built on!