

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Blessed or Cursed?

Scripture: Galatians 3:6-14

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Galatians 3:6-14. Even today, we live with the great heresy that threatened the Galatian churches. That great heresy that threatened them, as we know now by this time in Galatians, is that of adding works to faith in order to be saved. Essentially, it's an admission or a confession that the grace of God, the Cross of Christ, the shed blood, and all of God's power, is not sufficient to redeem men. When someone comes along and says, "There must be works added to faith," he is assuming that the work of Christ is not a finished work, but it is finished by human effort.

This heresy comes in many forms today. It comes in the form of 'faith plus baptism equals salvation,' it comes in the form of 'faith plus Mass observance equals salvation,' or 'faith plus obedience to certain laws and codes equals salvation,' or 'faith plus a good life equals salvation.' The teaching of Scripture is 'faith plus nothing equals salvation.' In Acts 16:30-31, remember, in the account of the Philippian jailer, the question is posed: "What must I do to be saved?" The answer is, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." Salvation, then, Biblically, is simply a matter of faith plus nothing. That's just one of many verses. There is no observable set of rules; there is no observable rite or ceremony that adds anything to salvation. Salvation is by faith in Christ alone, and I think that's clear every way you look at it.

First of all, our salvation is always personal; it's never ceremonial. It's always personal. It's never legalistic or ritualistic or ceremonial. We aren't saved by a code, we aren't saved by a set of laws, we aren't saved by a ritual of ceremony. We are saved simply by a personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Coming to church doesn't save you, having a Bible doesn't save you. It is a personal thing between you and God through faith.

In addition to that, salvation is always an inward thing as opposed to an outward thing. Any outward observance, such as baptism or, if it happens to be in the Catholic structure, a Mass observance or even extreme unction, which, of course, is the last rites. Anything that is outward has no effect on salvation, which is inward. It is of God; it is not of men. It is inside; it is between the heart and God.

Thirdly, I think it is very important to realize at the very beginning that our salvation is a spiritual thing and not a material thing. That falls in line with the fact that it is an inward thing and not an outward thing. So salvation, then, is a personal, internal, spiritual thing. It has nothing to do with forms; it has nothing to do with ceremonies or observances. It has only to do with a man's individual, personalized, internalized, spiritualized faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He alone saves, and He only

saves through that simple act of faith.

This is precisely the thing that is on Paul's mind as he writes Galatians. The truth he's dealing with here is that salvation is by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ alone. The reason he's writing this is because some people in Galatia who already had believed, and there were others, perhaps, attached to the church who were interested parties who had not believed, had been sold a line by some traveling Judaizers. Judaizers were people who tried to impose Judaism on everybody as the only way to get saved. They said, "It's fine to believe in Jesus, but you've also got to be circumcised and you've also got to keep all the ceremonies of Moses." So they'd all been exposed to this, and Paul is writing Galatians to straighten them out. He wants to show them that all that stuff has nothing to do with salvation, that circumcision and ceremony does not have anything to do with salvation. Rather, if you think you'll be saved by Christ and your works, you negate what Christ would do. When you add something to grace, you've destroyed grace. If you've destroyed grace, you've destroyed salvation.

The heart of the matter, in Galatians, is, "How is a man saved? How is a man made just before God?" That's really an important question. How does a man really gain the right to enter into the presence of God? How does a man really come to grips with the meaning of existence and enter into a knowledge of the holy? That's the question. Is it through his own works? Is it through his being good? Is it through self-righteousness, or is it by faith in an historic act and the promise of God? Well, in chapters 3-4, Paul defends the fact that salvation is by faith alone.

As we saw last time, he uses two areas: first of all, experience, and secondly, Scripture. You'll remember in our last study, in verses 1-5, Paul used the experience of the Galatians to show them that justification was by faith. He says to them, in effect, "How in the world could you ever buy that bag of bologna from the Judaizers that salvation is by works when you yourselves have already been saved by faith? When you were saved, you received everything. You received Christ, you received the Holy Spirit, you saw the wondrous works God did among you, you had the whole manifestation of the Trinity made to you immediately upon your salvation. When you knew, in your own experience, that all of that came to you by faith, how could you ever buy the idea that salvation was by works when it contradicts your own experience?" Paul said, "I preached the Gospel to you, publicly portrayed Jesus crucified before your very eyes [verse 1]. You heard, you believed, they eye of faith, committed your life to Jesus Christ, immediately received the Holy Spirit [verse 2]. Are you so stupid that, having begun in the Spirit, you're going to make yourself perfect by your own flesh? How could you possibly, when you have everything through faith, assume that works is going to gain you some part of salvation you didn't have?" Even in verse 5, he says, "And you saw the Father, as He ministered to you the Spirit, and as He worked miracles among you. To go back to law is not improvement, it's degeneracy."

So Paul, then, said, "Your experience is proof of justification by faith." But now, he turns to an even higher authority, and that is Scripture. Let me give you an illustration of this pattern. Remember how

Peter says, in II Peter, "We were eyewitnesses of His majesty. We were with Him in the holy mount. I saw Christ, I was an eyewitness of His majesty." He's defending this thing on the basis of his own experience. Then he changes gears and says this, "But we have a more sure word of prophecy. For we know that the Scripture does not have any private interpretation, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." So he says, "Experience is great, but I have a more sure word, and that's Scripture." Well, that's exactly what Paul is saying. He's saying, "Your experience should have taught you justification was by faith, but since obviously you're confused, let me give you a stronger thing than your experience. That is, the Scripture itself." In 3:6, he launches into a Scriptural defense of justification by faith.

Let me give you an interesting thought. The only Scripture available to Paul at this time was what? The Old Testament. So he uses the Old Testament to defend salvation by faith. That's important, because there are many people who think the Old Testament teaches that you are saved by works; it does not teach that. God is always consistent and salvation is always by faith. You couldn't make yourself righteous in the Old Testament any more than you can in the New Testament. It is the same incapacity man has had since the fall, so salvation has always been by faith.

So what you really have in this section is a theology of the Old Testament. If you want to know how people were saved in the Old Testament, just read through here and you'll find out. It's the same way they are saved at any time: by faith in God's revelation. You say, "Did they have to believe in everything? Did they have to believe in the death of Christ, the resurrection of Christ and the Second Coming?" Of course not. They had to believe as much as God had revealed. At any point in time, a man was required to believe all God had said. If a man was living in the time of Adam, God hadn't said too much. He had to believe all that God had revealed. If the man was living later on, in the time of Moses, God began to say more things and man had to believe all God had revealed. If a man lives post-New Testament, he has to believe all God revealed, up through the fullness of salvation as seen in Jesus Christ.

This, then, becomes a tremendously powerful point. I want you to hang onto this, because it will give you insights into the book of Galatians and into the techniques of Paul. The Judaizers, these false teachers who were going around saying, "In order to get saved, you have to be circumcised, you have to be a Jew because only Jews can get saved." That was their line. "Only Jews get saved. Therefore, if you're a Gentile, first you become a Jew, get circumcised, obey the law of Moses, then you can get saved. But the only way into salvation is through the vestibule of Judaism. No Gentile can come in sideways without becoming a Jew first," that's essentially what they were saying.

You know this, don't you, that they supported their doctrine on the basis of the Old Testament, right? You know that their whole line of approach would be that the Old Testament gave the standards. So Paul takes the Old Testament here and just turns it on them. He says, "Let me show you what the Old Testament really says." Believe me, the Jews had sort of adulterated the Old Testament to make

it accommodate themselves. Paul takes the Old Testament (and very likely, these are the very arguments they had used to substantiate their point) and twists it around so that it comes out right and true and uses it to destroy their points. He takes the Old Testament, to which the Judaizers hung, and uses it against them.

The passage we're going to look at, 3:6-14, falls into two parts. In this passage, Paul gives proof from the Old Testament, for salvation by faith. First of all, he gives positive proof. Then secondly, negative proof. That's as sophisticated as the outline will get. It is very difficult to outline Galatians because Paul is so impassioned that he doesn't always follow that normal sequence of logical points, though he is always logical.

First of all, in Paul's presentation of justification by faith, he presents positive proof in verses 6-9. Positive proof that justification is by faith, and for it he uses the illustration of Abraham. Verse 6. "Even as Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness." He says to them, "You had your experience, you were saved by faith, even as Abraham was." Now you know that this is really shooting the arrows right at the Judaizers' argument, because they surely would have used Abraham as their proof-point that you had to be circumcised. You know that Abraham, even as old as he was, when he was finally called by God, when he went out of Ur of the Chaldees and got over to the land where God sent him, even as an older man, he was circumcised? It was no doubt a point that the Judaizers made, that "See, it goes all the way back to Abraham, the first of all the Jews. He had to be circumcised, therefore, that's the standard." So Paul takes Abraham and shows the truth about it.

In Genesis 12, to give you a little insight, let's look at verses 1-3. "Now the Lord had said unto Abram [his name was later changed], 'Get thee out of thy country, from thy kindred, from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show you. I will make of thee a great nation; I'll bless thee, make thy name great, and thou shalt be a blessing. I will bless them that bless thee, curse them that curse thee, and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.'" Look at verse 4. "So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken unto him." It says he was 75 years old when he departed. Now, I've heard that old people have their roots down. God comes to him and says, "Get up and get out of here. I'm going to take you to a place, and I'm not even going to tell you where it is." And he did it; he believed God. He accepted that information from God and obeyed.

In Genesis 15, God had said to him, "Abram, I'm going to bless you. An heir will come out of your loins," verse 4. I love this, he said, "Look up into heaven and count the stars, if you can number them. So will your seed be." God says, "Abram, look up there. See all the stars? That's how many children are going to come from you." Now, you know Abraham had a problem. He didn't have a son. As you know the story well, he was over 90 by the time he got around to this occasion and so was Sarah. Now, if you were 95 and your wife was 90 and God gave you that message, you'd say, "Could we have a re-run on that?" I mean, let's be honest, that's not simple to believe, is it? Especially when he had no seed, he had no son. I love what it says in verse 6. "And he believed in

the Lord, and He counted it to him for righteousness." How was Abram, or Abraham, made righteous? He believed. That's it! So Paul simply pulls out this whole concept of Abraham and just sticks it in their faces and says, "Look at the truth about him!" Verse 6. "Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." There, he's just quoting out of Genesis 15:6.

Now, no doubt the Judaizers were urging the Galatians to be circumcised as Abraham had been. It seems likely that Paul uses Abraham here because they had probably used him. Of course, you remember that God had said to Abraham that the seed that would come from him, the great nation that would come from him, would have a special sign. That sign would be circumcision, the removal of the male foreskin, it would be the sign that he was truly a child of Abraham, physically. It was true that, the eighth day after birth, it was to be done. It was also important from the standpoint of the medical perspective, as a preventative for many diseases and as a healthy thing. God knew all that. In addition to that, it was a sign of those that were of the seed of Abraham. It was an identity for the nation. It was a peculiarity that made Israel stand out in the land, along with other peculiarities that God gave them, in order that they might remain separated. God wanted to cut off any possibility of relations with pagans, so He gave them all these various and sundry differences to keep them separate as His witnesses.

So God said, "In Abraham, all are going to be blessed, because out of his loins will come a great nation, and out of that nation will come one individual who will be Messiah." When God said, "In thy seed will all the nations be blessed," He meant that through Abraham's ultimate seed, Jesus Christ, all nations would be able to come to God, because of that tremendous promise.

Well, the Judaizers, of course, were to conclude this. That since in Abraham, all were to be blessed, "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed," therefore the only way to get blessed is to be a Jew." Now that was the Judaizers' logic. "If all the nations of the earth are blessed in Abraham, then the only way to get into Abraham is to be circumcised and take on Judaism." So only circumcised people could ever be righteous. No one could ever participate in the blessings of Messiah unless he was circumcised.

Well, that argument didn't work, and Paul shows why. Want to hear something interesting? Genesis 15:6 says, "Abraham believed in the Lord and it was counted to him as righteousness." Do you know when he was circumcised? 14 years later. That was merely a physical sign; it had nothing to do with the spiritual act of declaring him righteous. That was the physical sign to maintain separation between Israel and the other peoples, in order that they might be purely God's people and shine as a testimony in the world.

Let me give you another interesting point. The Judaizers also taught that you had to keep the law to be saved. It also seems interesting to me that Moses lived a *long* time after Abraham. The law wasn't even given when Abraham was alive! You have to go through all the patriarchs in the book Genesis

before you finally get to Exodus and run into Moses. The law came long after that. Circumcision even came 14 years later. How, then, was God saving people from the very beginning? How? By faith. The addition of circumcision as a sign of an earthly relationship didn't change that. A circumcised person isn't automatically saved. Remember Romans 9? "Not all those who are of Israel are true Israel."

Paul really wails away on that argument in Romans 2. "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh, but he is a Jew [or a true Jew] who is one inwardly and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, not in the letter." Circumcision was a sign of an earthly identity; salvation is a sign of a heavenly identity. It needed to make a difference. If the Judaizers had looked carefully at Abraham, their whole argument would be shot down because the law didn't come for many years later. Circumcision didn't come for 14 years later.

You say, "How was Abraham saved?" God made him a promise and he believed it. He didn't have to believe in everything about the Lord Jesus Christ and everything about the Cross, he just had to believe God to the point of God's revelation. God declared him righteous.

Well, the Judaizers argued, of course, that no one could participate in the blessings of salvation unless he was circumcised. That was not true then anymore than it's true today that there is any kind of ceremony or rite that anybody goes through, or any kind of a legal observance that anybody keeps, that means salvation. It is not so.

In Romans 4:8, and we'll look several times at this passage, but let's read. "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." Boy, I guess, right? Amen to that! "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." Oh, I like that one. That's me, incidentally. That's you too, if you love the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, that's nice to be so blessed. You say, "Oh, I like to be blessed. To not have to pay for my sin? To not be held responsible for my sin? How do I get this blessing?" Verse 9. "Cometh this blessing, then, upon the circumcision only? Or upon the uncircumcision also?" Do you have to be a Jew to get it? Do you have to be circumcised? "But we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness." Faith was reckoned to Abraham. From the very start, it was faith. "How was it then reckoned? When he was in circumcision or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision." In other words, Paul says, "He was declared righteous before he ever got circumcised." Don't you see how important it is that God waited 14 years?

Verse 11. "He received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith, which he had yet being uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all them that believe though they be not circumcised." In other words, the issue with Abraham was he believed God, he was righteous, and circumcision came along as a special Jewish identity. But in truest sense, Abraham is the father of everyone who believes because he is the primary one who exhibits salvation by faith. Everybody who comes along and is saved by faith is a follower in Abraham's path. Pretty clear argument.

You know, this was a real hang-up for the Jews and we can't translate it into today. We have to translate it into today by looking around and seeing all the ways people drum up to get saved. All the cults and all these other things that are going on around us that we see so often, anytime we see any of them add anything to the purity of faith, that's a perversion. Salvation is by faith.

The Jews had this problem: they were adding things to faith. "Fine, believe in Christ. Great. But you have to do this and this and this." They boasted in the physical features. In fact, the physiological fitness was the thing that made them think they were really right with God. In Romans 2, Paul says, "Now, you're putting your confidence in the law, you're putting confidence in ceremony, you're putting confidence in the fact that you're Jews, and you're putting confidence in your nationalism. Forget it. There is no one able to put confidence in the flesh." But the Jews stood on it.

In Acts 15, you know, certain men came. Here were the Judaizers. They said, "Except you be circumcised after the manner of Moses, you can't be saved." Acts 15:5. "The Pharisees rose up and said, 'It was needful to circumcise them and command them to keep the law of Moses.'" They wanted to make all those Gentile Christians go through that or else their salvation was not legitimate. They were always bragging about their nationalism, too. They came to Jesus and would say, "Why, how dare you speak like that! We are the sons of Abraham." See, they were always figuring their salvation was based on their nationalism. Jesus said, "For I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. That's no big deal."

In Luke 3:8, we get another little insight to their attitude. Jesus says to them, "Bring forth, therefore, fruits worthy of repentance. And begin not to say within yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' Forget that routine!" They were forever lost in that thing, and he says, "Stop saying that! Start revealing the true salvation by the fruit of righteousness." If righteousness is really there, there will be some fruit, right? "Quit claiming your heritage. It doesn't do you any good."

Jesus was talking to them in John 8 and, of course, they were throwing this stuff about being Abraham's children again. They said, "We are Abraham's seed and we're never in bondage to any man!" Boy, did they have short memories! They'd been in bondage all their lives, from one nation to the other. "We are Abraham's seed and never in bondage to any man." They said to Jesus, "How do you say, 'You shall be free'?" Remember what Jesus said to them? "If you believe and continue in my word, you are my disciples for real. You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." They said, "Oh, we are free! We're the children of Abraham; we've never been in bondage." Jesus answered them, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, whoever commits sin is the bond slave to sin. Guess again." Then He goes on to tell them they're not sons in the house, they're servants.

Over in John 8:39, they said to Him, "Abraham is our father." They went through this every time because they were always counting on this as their salvation. "We're Jews. That settles it!"

Automatic salvation because they were Jewish. Jesus said unto them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. But now you seek to kill me, a man that has told you the truth, which I have heard of God. Abraham didn't do that. Abraham didn't do what you're doing. What you're doing, instead of believing what God is saying through me, you're denying it. You're just the opposite of Abraham." Then He says in verse 44, "Your father isn't Abraham, your father is the Devil," which didn't go over real big.

Then, of course, they begin to question Jesus. They say to him in verse 53, "Are you greater than our father Abraham?" Whoa, does He ever give them an answer. Further on down, in verse 58, He says to them, "Before Abraham was, I AM." And they took up stones to cast at Him; they couldn't handle it. They were counting on their ceremonial nationalism to save them. No. Of course, they were pious enough to think that God owed them the debt of salvation because of how good they were. That's one of Satan's greatest deceits.

Well, still at verse 6 in Galatians. Abraham's salvation was graciously granted to him, wasn't it? By faith. His life is an illustration of the manner in which men in all ages are saved, that's what Paul is saying. He is the supreme example that salvation is spiritual, internal, personal, by faith. He is the father of all who come to God by faith. Now, Abraham is not our father in the physical sense. You don't get saved and automatically become a Jew. No, you're still a Gentile, and God still has a wonderful plan for the Jews. But when you do get saved and come to Jesus Christ, spiritually, in a moral sense, you are the seed of Abraham. That is, as he was the first-grade example of faith, you follow in his footsteps because you come to God through faith. You follow in his pattern.

Let me illustrate this to you. Just to show you how important it is, Paul writes the whole fourth chapter of Romans (I told you we'd go back there) to explain how Abraham was saved because this is so important. Look at verse 1. "What shall we say then, that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, has found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he had something of which to glory, but not before God. For what saith the Scripture? 'Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness,' Genesis 15:6 again. Paul uses this argument again and again because the Jews always threw this up. It was a matter of faith. Verse 4. "Now to him that works, is the reward not reckoned of grace but of debt?" Now if you're going to work your way, you're going to make God pay you some debt for your goodness, it isn't going to work. You're not good enough. If grace is grace, it's a free gift. You don't work for it. If you're working at all for your salvation, you'll never be saved. Never. If you're working at all for your salvation, you're damned. No way. Verse 5. "But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness." Yes. If you're working at all for your salvation, you missed it. You missed it.

He goes on to talk about Abraham and all the features of Abraham's faith. He just goes over and over the same thing. Verse 16. "Therefore it is of faith that it might be by grace." Grace is free favor, and if you start trying to pay God for His grace, you've destroyed grace. All the way down, verse 18, Abraham hoped, "Who against hope believed in hope." In other words, he knew the physical

impossibility of having a son, but he believed. "That he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, 'So shall thy seed be,'" he actually believed God. "And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body, now dead," it wasn't really dead, but in terms of being able to produce children, it was. He was about 100 years old. "Neither did he consider the deadness of Sarah's womb. He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God, being fully persuaded that what he had promised, he was able to perform. Therefore, it was imputed to him for righteousness."

Now watch verse 23. "It was not written for his sake alone that was imputed to him, but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up for our offenses and raised again for our justification." Listen, God had set up Abraham in history as a classic illustration of salvation by faith, not only for his sake, but for our sakes also, that we might see that, indeed, that is how God saves men.

It's a simple truth, but so important. Abraham, also, becomes a further pattern of living by faith. This is a footnote. That, of course, is given to us in Hebrews 11:8. "Abraham was called to go to a place. He sojourned and looked for a city with foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Through faith, he, together with Sarah, received strength to conceive seed when he was past age, because he judged him faithful who had promised." So forth and so on all the way through. He is the pattern of faithfulness. Verse 17. "By faith, Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac." Verse 19. "Because he believed God was able to raise him up, even from the dead." You've often wondered how Abraham could ever have believed that it was right to kill his son? You know why he was willing to lift that knife? You know what he believed? I think, in my mind, that he believed that Isaac would be resurrected. That's what it says in Hebrews.

You say, "What would make him believe that?" In the first place, he knew that both he and Sarah were dead to start with, so it wouldn't be any big deal for God to do it again. He did it once. According to Hebrews 11, he must have believed in the resurrection of Isaac, so he was willing to slay him. I imagine, in his heart, there must have been some anticipation, even to see how God was going to do this miracle. He believed God to that extent, a tremendous example of the pattern of faith. He believed even in what he couldn't see. He couldn't see the Seed that was coming, he couldn't see the Redeemer that was promised, he couldn't see all the nations being blessed. That's why Jesus said in John 8:56, "Abraham your father was extremely happy to see my day; he saw it and rejoiced." He saw it far off, didn't he, by faith? Absolutely on the basis of faith. Well, that's Abraham. You see, what God wanted out of him was trust. "Blessed are they," He said to Thomas, "Who have not seen yet believe."

So, beloved, if people ask you to define all that is in Christianity in the test tube, you have to tell them that you can't. It's a faith life. Well, when the promise came concerning his son, Abraham believed and it was counted to him as righteousness. What a beautiful thought. That makes the standard of

salvation the same the world over. Look at verse 7. "Know ye therefore that they who are of faith, the same are the sons of Abraham." Beloved, true children of Abraham are those who come to God through faith. His was a faith salvation. The verse begins, "Know ye," in the authorized. It would probably be better translated in the indicative rather than the imperative. Then it would say, "You know," or, "You perceive, therefore, that anyone who is of faith is spiritually a child of Abraham." You are a son of Abraham, not in a physical sense, not in a genealogical sense, not in an earthly sense, but in an ethical sense, a moral sense, a spiritual sense, by faith.

Believe me, I don't want us to think for a moment that because we're all children of Abraham, there is nothing left for the Jews. God still has plans for His earthly seed. If you want to get into that, you must read Romans 11, where it says, "Has God set aside Israel, is God through with Israel? God forbid." No, God has marvelous plans yet for Israel as a nation, as an entity on Earth, physically. But in a spiritual sense, we are the children of Abraham as we follow his pattern of salvation by faith.

Well, he establishes, then, the fact that Abraham is justified by faith alone and the true descendants of Abraham are not just Jews, but people who are of faith. Verse 8. "And the Scripture," and here, he gets into the heavy part of his argument and starts quoting Scripture. "The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached before the Gospel unto Abraham, saying, 'In thee shall all nations be blessed.'" Hang onto this, because we have to kind of untangle this verse to get into the logic of Paul.

Here is his direct answer. Notice the word 'Gospel.' It means 'good news.' What is the good news that God wants to give us? Salvation by faith. Did He give that to Abraham? He certainly did. "He preached before the good news that salvation comes by faith unto Abraham." But he preached also that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, that all the nations down through the ages would be justified by faith, as well as the Jews. Sure, he didn't just say, "Your seed will be blessed." He said, "In thee will all the nations of the Earth be blessed." So at the very time when Abraham was given the promise, God told Abraham that Gentile nations would be saved by faith. Listen, the proof in that verse is simply this: "In thee shall all nations be blessed." That means this; that means that nations, as nations, will be blessed through the seed of Abraham. They don't have to become Jews; the Scripture doesn't say, "All the nations will become what you are." No, all the nations will be blessed through the seed that comes.

The Judaizers would say, of course, "There's the proof. It says, 'In thee will all the nations be blessed.' Therefore, all the nations have to come into Judaism." No, no, no. Paul says, "What it's saying there is that, 'In thee shall all the nations as nations be blessed.' God is going to justify the Gentiles through faith." That's what he's saying. Really, the first part of verse 8 is an exposition of the statement at the end of verse 8. The Old Testament says, "In thee shall all the nations be blessed." Paul says, "That means that God is going to justify Gentiles through faith." If the Galatians could just get this, they wouldn't get messed up by the Judaizers. The thing that is foreseen, then, in

that statement, "In thee shall all nations be blessed," is that Gentiles would be justified through faith, receiving the gift without works.

This becomes such an important point, and I want to draw your attention to Acts 15:13. James gives a little speech at the Jerusalem Council, and they're arguing here about how to get saved, whether by faith or works. It's the same argument. Abraham was given a glorious doctrine that the whole world would be saved the same way he was, in the coming of the Messiah. "In thy loins, through thy seed shall all nations be blessed. The one who comes will be the point of blessing for all nations as nations."

Now notice, James gives a speech beginning in Acts 15:13. "After they had held their peace, James answered, saying, 'Men and brethren, hearken unto me. Simon hath declared how God first did visit the nations [that's Peter] to take out of them a people for his name. To this agree the words of the prophets, as it is written, "After this, I will return and will build again the tabernacle of David which has fallen down, I will build again it's ruins and set it up. That the residue of men might seek after the Lord. And all the nations upon whom my name is called," saith the Lord, "Who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all his works in the beginning of the age."' Now James wraps up in verse 18 by saying what is synonymous to, "This is the plan of God. This is God's whole plan laid out." What is the plan? Well, the plan is Gentile's are going to get saved.

Simon says that God first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. That's the Gentile church. "And to this agree the words of the prophet, as it is written, 'After this, I will return.'" That's the second coming. "And build again the tabernacle of David." What's that? That's the Kingdom. "...Which has fallen down, I will build again its ruins and set it up." So you have the chronology there from the church, the second coming, to the Kingdom. But look what happens in the Kingdom.

Verse 17. "The residue of men." That isn't Jews, is it? No, it's Gentiles. "That they might seek after the Lord, and all the nations..." Now notice, James says this, quoting Amos 9:11-12, "The prophets have said that, in the great time of the Kingdom, Gentiles will be saved as Gentiles." You see the point? They don't have to be Jews. No. "The residue of men shall seek after the Lord and all the nations upon whom my name is called." So he says, "Gentiles are going to be saved as Gentiles in the Kingdom. Now, if they're saved as Gentiles, that means they didn't have to become Jews first." That's his point.

The prophets have said, then, that Gentiles will be saved as Gentiles. Believe me, James is saying in his mind, "If they're going to be saved as Gentiles in the Kingdom, in that glorious day, certainly we wouldn't prevent Gentiles from being saved as Gentiles today." The whole argument of Acts 15 was brought up by the Judaizers who wanted them all to get circumcised. So James says in verse 19, "Look, my judgment is that we trouble not them who, from among the Gentiles, are turned to God.

Let them alone; they have a right to come to God as Gentiles. They don't need to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses, ceremonial law or any other law for that matter, even the moral law, for salvation."

Well, Paul then uses positive proof from Scripture here in Galatians, to show that salvation came to Abraham through faith and that became the pattern. To Abraham, God preached salvation through faith for all Gentiles when He said, "In thee shall all nations be blessed." Verse 9 closes out his positive argument. "So then, they who are of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham. Those who are believing are blessed with believing Abraham." That's really the statement Paul uses to summarize everything on the positive side. Salvation comes through faith, to those who believe, just as it came to Abraham through believing.

Beloved, it's so important, as we present the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to others, that we let them understand carefully and fully that salvation is purely and only a matter of faith. The reason it's important Paul outlines all through Galatians. Let me just read you 5:2. "Behold, I, Paul, say unto you that if you be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing." In other words, if people try to add anything to salvation by faith, they have destroyed the work of Christ on their behalf. It behooves us, then, beloved, as we share the Gospel, to make sure that we add nothing to it. It must be always and only a personal, spiritual, internal matter of an individual's faith. Then, when they come to Christ, there are some practical fruits that are to be the outgrowth of that faith. We need to be careful to make the distinction between the two. Let's have prayer.

Father, we're thankful again for the opportunity that has been ours tonight to talk about this subject. Lord, we've heard things that are familiar to us, yet You've put them here in the study of Galatians for us to understand them. Father, we pray that there might be a freshness in the old, old story of salvation. We ask, Father, that we might gain new insights for sharing it with others. We know some of our brothers and sisters are sharing with Jewish people who maybe will understand better what justification is because they'll be able to show them this particular passage.

Father, we're thankful for the fullness of the arguments and the persuasions of Scripture to show us the truth clearly, even to appeal to the logical, historical mind. We thank you for the fact that our experience tells us that justification is by faith. We did nothing and we know that. We thank you that Scripture corroborates it. Father, may we be as bold and as informed as Paul, that we may use the Scripture wisely, carefully, powerfully, to present the truth. Father, if there are some here tonight who are counting on anything but faith in Jesus Christ for salvation, may they be stripped bare. May they face their sin. May they be as Paul characterized the people in Romans 3; may they be stripped naked before God, with no works to credit themselves. May they be left with nothing and may they fall on the mercy and grace of God, on the free salvation offered by simply believing in the perfect and finished work of Jesus Christ. Father, I pray that I might bear the message faithfully, that we all might, that the finished work we may see done in the lives of hundreds, even thousands, before

Jesus comes. We pray in His name, Amen.

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