

Abraham--Justified by Grace, Part 2

Romans 4:13-17

45-38

It's a great joy tonight to be able to open the Word of God with you and I encourage you now to take your Bible and look into Romans chapter 4. And tonight we're going to study again; it really demands that of us as we look at the intricacy of Paul's argument in the Roman epistle. In fact, this past week as I was teaching at Dallas Seminary and I was teaching in a program for doctoral students, students earning a doctor's degree, I basically used as my notes for teaching the material that I've preached to you. And that was kind of exciting because there aren't too many churches in the country where the people are so attuned and so open and sensitive and so thoughtful about the instruction of the Word of God that you can give them the same kind of information that you would give students in a seminary studying for a doctorate. But you are that kind of congregation and it's a tremendous joy to be able to open the Word of God and to study it in depth and know that your heart is there.

And that's why I think it's so much more exciting for me to preach here than anywhere else. I've preached a lot of other places, a lot of other churches, a lot of conference centers, a lot of great meetings of people here and there, and to a lot of different audiences but there's no joy like preaching here because I know what you know and I know, I think, what you may not know because we haven't gotten to it yet. And I know what your undergirding is in the Word of God, and I know what your appetite is and it's just exciting to be able to just go into that kind of thing and feed you from the Word of God. And as well I confess to you that I feed my own soul.

In fact, someone said, "How did you develop your style of preaching?" And I said, (I think it's not developed quite yet, but it's on the way.) but I said, "Basically, the people are victims, that's my basic theory of preaching. They are victims of what I want to know and want to say." Basically, I want to understand every word in the Bible. I believe every word is true and every word is pure and every word is written by God and so I want to study every word and so we go in and do that and then you sort of just get the spill-over of what happens. In fact I never study the Bible to make a sermon, never. I study all week to understand the passage and in the process of understanding the passage I usually have some things to say that come out of that as a sermon that I can share with you. But the real goal is for me to understand the Word of God. That's my great hunger and desire. And as I say, you're kind of victims of that and you have to kind of go along with me in my pursuit of knowing God's truth. And I'm so grateful for that appetite in you. Believe me, I preach some places and I preach my heart out and they just yawn their way through the whole deal. And you know, you have to have an appetite for the Word of God. Give them a little profundities, three points, and a poem, and a few tear-jerking stories; they'd think it was profound. But we don't do that. Anyway, besides, I get invited back here. That's nice.

Romans chapter 4 and I want us to continue to look at the faith of Abraham. Obviously Paul and the Holy Spirit, God Himself, expected us to think about Scripture or he wouldn't have made it as profound as it is. You know, I remember when I preached a sermon one time and a person came to

me afterwards —

I was young and I was preaching in a Youth for Christ rally — and they said to me, "You know, you're just making it too complex. Don't you remember the little motto KISS, Keep It Simple, Stupid? And that's sort of the basic thing that you have to remember when you talk to people is keep it simple." And one other person told me, "You know, there's a phrase that I use in my ministry just to remind me, 'Keep your cookies on the bottom shelf so everybody can get them.'" And then when you read Romans you say, "That's not simple and that's not on the bottom shelf." And you must dig in a little more deeply and I believe the Lord has given us capacity to do that, so I'm excited to share with you, particularly tonight. We're going to be looking at verses 13 to 17 of this chapter.

This past week, I guess over a week ago, a missionary came into my office from India, been there 34 years, and he said, "I want to show you the English-speaking magazine of India. This is an issue from this year, January of this year. And I want you to see what's going on currently in India." And the entire magazine cover and first section was devoted to the largest religious ceremony in the world that occurs in India. It only occurs every six years and so there's a tremendous build-up for this great event. It is called the *ardh kumbh mela* and it is a Hindu event.

Let me tell you how it functions. There is a place in India where the Ganges and the Jamuna River come together. And the fabled waters of these rivers meet in a conflux known to the Indians as a *prahag*. And it is at this conflux of the Ganges and the Jamuna called the *prahag* that the *ardh kumbh mela* takes place. It begins with a parade of stark naked Indian holy men, who by the way are not too holy or they wouldn't be stark naked. They are known as *digambar sadhus* and they lead this stark naked parade to the water, followed by literally millions of Hindus. It is the world's largest single religious event and these millions of people follow the *digambar sadhus* down to the river to dip themselves in the waters of the *prahag*.

Now, it involves heavy expense. Some of these people are poor and they have to come by foot and they begin the journey months in advance to make sure they arrive on time. It is January and the weather is cold and the water is freezing. They come from everywhere, rich and poor. All caste barriers are set aside in this event. And as they gather around the waters of the *prahag*, there are fakirs (f-a-k-i-r-s) everywhere those who sit on the bed of nails, those who walk over the glass, and those who walk and lie down on the hot coals. One of the common sights that you would see at the edge of the *prahag* is worshipers taking long knives and piercing their tongues to sentence themselves to eternal silence as a way to appease their gods.

Some engage in killing the use of their limbs by atrophy such as one man who was depicted there who had had his arm in the air for eight years. His fingernail descended down here about two and a half feet off the forefinger, the others were growing all kinds of strange ways. And he had held his arm up in some effort to appeal to his god for over eight years and it was utterly atrophied in that position.

Others willfully stare at the sun until they burn their eyes and are blind. The photographs that I saw of the *ardh kumbh mela* in the magazine, to put it mildly, were shocking, a literal sea of millions of people on the river bank. And their holy writings say this, quote, "Those who bathe at the conflux of the black and white river, the Ganga and the Jamuna, go to heaven." Quote again, "The pilgrim who bathes at this place wins absolution for his whole family and even if he has perpetrated 100 crimes, he is redeemed the moment he touches the Ganga, whose waters wash away his sins." End quote.

Now all along the water's edge there are little booths and these are shaving booths. And the deeply devout people strip themselves bare and they go into the shaving booth and they are shaved from tip of the head to the tip of the toe, every hair on their bodies including their eyebrows and their eyelashes, shaved off. And every hair that is shaved is collected. And all of this hair from all of these people is thrown into the filthy water. And their religious writings say, and I quote, "For every hair thus thrown in, you are promised a million years residence in heaven." This is last January, folks, not five thousand years ago.

Now, one of the most acceptable gifts to offer, if you want to go even further than having your hair shorn, is to offer your life. And religious suicide at the *ardh kumbh mela* has been somewhat common. The writings say, "Whoever wishes to be born in heaven ought to fast to a grain of rice and then drown himself in these waters." They believe, according to their holy writings, that "bathing in these waters washes away all the pollution of sin."

And the article closed with this comment, "Millions who come with spiritual hunger depart with peace in their hearts and renewed faith." Quite a comment, peace in their hearts and renewed faith. What a hellish damning illusion from Satan. But it is illustrative of the systems that Satan designs that are built around the idea that you can redeem yourself, have your sins washed away and gain heaven by some ceremonies, or some religious rites, or some religious rituals, or some works of an external nature.

Now we are shocked at such paganism. We are shocked that anybody would believe that you would have your sins washed away in the filthy water that would be in a place like that. You would never be able to understand from your vantage point how someone could think that every piece of hair dropped off their body into the water would gain for them a million years residence in heaven. And we are shocked by that kind of behavior.

I submit to you that you should be no less shocked at any religious system that says you can gain heaven and the forgiveness of your sins by some religious ceremony or some work of the flesh. They're all the same. They may take different forms. They may be more sophisticated and more cultured, but they are all the same.

Jesus faced a very sophisticated kind of religion in His day that was no different than that kind of Hinduism. It was the religion of the Pharisees, in which they believed that by external rites like circumcision, which is a kind of shaving of its own, and by certain religious works on the outside they were buying their way into heaven and having their sins forgiven. No different at all. You see, there are only two kinds of religion in the whole world: the religion of divine accomplishment, and that is Christianity, and the accomplishment was Christ on the cross; and the religion of human achievement, and that covers every other religion there is. Jesus faced it and so did Paul.

And so, Paul writes in Romans 3, beginning in verse 21 and through Romans 4 and on into Romans 5, he writes about that saving faith that comes by grace. He is showing here that salvation and the forgiveness of sin and heaven is not available to men through ritual, ceremony, self-sacrifice, religious works of any kind, but only by grace through faith in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's the only way. There's no other way.

You say, "But aren't those people sincere?" Yes, they're probably sincere but they're damned to hell forever because they're wrong. Salvation comes only by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, he has stated that in marvelous terms in the third chapter, verses 21 to 31. He's given us a statement of justification by faith. Now he gives us an illustration in chapter 4. And the illustration is Abraham. And he's illustrating the message that he gave in chapter 3. Abraham is the model of justification by grace through faith. And as I told you some weeks ago, it's a wonderful choice that he makes because Abraham to the Jew was the model of justification by works. They said Abraham was justified because he was circumcised. That's an outward cutting away. And he was justified because he kept the works of the law. That's personal self-righteousness. And Paul says, contrary to what you've taught about Abraham, he was justified by grace through faith. And he proves it in the chapter, doesn't he?

Now, the reason that I'm taking time with this is because, people, this is the heart and soul of the Christian faith. We must understand salvation, right? This is the blueprint. Now, Paul approaches Abraham from three perspectives. First of all he says Abraham was justified by faith not works; that's verses 1 to 8. Then he says he was justified by grace not law; that's verses 9 to 17. Then he says he was justified by divine power not human effort; that's verses 18 to 25. And they overlap and they crisscross, but those are the basic threads or themes in each section. He was justified by faith not works, by grace not law, by divine power not human effort.

Now we already looked at verses 1 to 8 and we saw that Abraham was justified by faith not works. There are no works involved. Verse 3 is the sum of it, "Abraham believed God and righteousness was put to his account," because he believed. And that's the essence of it.

Now we're looking at the second section, verses 9 to 17. And the key to this section is found in verse 16. The first section, it was by faith not works, and here it was by grace not law. And verse 16 says, "Therefore it is of faith (as we saw in the first eight verses) in order that it might be by grace." You see, if salvation is a matter of simply believing and you can't do anything then it has to be a gift from God, doesn't it? It has to be by grace. Salvation is not earned. If you can't earn it, if it has to be by faith, then it has to be a gift of God's grace. What is grace? It is God's absolutely free favor to an undeserving sinner. God's absolutely free favor to an undeserving sinner. Abraham was justified, that is, made right with God. Abraham was brought into a right relationship with God because he believed, and that because God was gracious to him.

How was God gracious? God gave him a promise, and that's a key word in verse 16. It was by grace, to the end that the promise might be sure to all the seed. God graciously offered Abraham a promise; that was the grace. Abraham received it; that was the faith. So, salvation is not earned, it is offered by God, an act of His free favor to an undeserving sinner. And it is received through faith; faith becomes the means by which it is received.

Now, as we look at verses 9 to 17, I'm just going to remind you of a thought. As the apostle shows that salvation came by grace not law, the first thing he points to is circumcision. And in verses 9 to 12 we saw this last week, and I really think that's probably one of the most important messages we'll ever have in Romans. But what he says there is that Abraham was not justified by circumcision. And that's very important because the Jews believed that that's exactly how he was justified, by circumcision. In fact, they believe that's the way everybody ought to be justified. But Paul shows in verses 9 to 12 that Abraham was declared right with God and it was 14 years later that he was

circumcised. So, circumcision becomes only a symbol. A symbol of what? A symbol that says to every other generation: What you are doing on the outside is what I want to do where? In the heart. That's why the prophet said, circumcise your hearts. Circumcision marks out a Jew. But more than that it is a symbol on the outside and every time a father went through that throughout all the history of Judaism, he was giving a symbol of what God wanted to do on the inside, cutting away the flesh, as it were. And so, Abraham was not justified by circumcision, and that flies in the face of everything the Jews taught. They believed they were saved by having circumcision, much as people today believe you're saved by infant what? Baptism. And baptism, like circumcision, is only a symbol. It symbolizes on the outside what God wants to do where? In the heart.

Now the second thing the Jew leaned on, not only circumcision, but the second thing he leaned on was the keeping of the law. He believed that you were saved by circumcision, which was the first act of a life of law-keeping. And they also believed that Abraham was justified by keeping the law. And so, as you come to verse 13, in 13 to 17 Paul deals with the issue of the law. Now listen carefully, here's what he's saying in this text and this will give you the overview, and then we'll look at it in detail.

First he says Abraham was not made right with God by circumcision because he was circumcised 14 years after God said he was right with Him. Secondly, listen now, he was not made right with God by keeping the law because the law came 430 years later. Now that's a fairly devastating argument, wouldn't you say? You see, the Jews believed these two things were that which brought a man into right relationship with God.

In Acts chapter 15, you remember, it says, "There rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees who believed, saying it was needful to circumcise them and command them to keep the law of Moses." Right, that's exactly what they believed, that you were saved by circumcision and obedience to the law of Moses. And what is Paul saying? He's saying this; you don't come into a right relationship to God by an outward ceremony or by an outward observance of laws. When Abraham was declared right with God he had no circumcision. And when he was declared right with God he had kept no law because the Mosaic law hadn't even been given yet.

How then was he made right with God? Verse 13 says God gave him a promise and when God gave him a promise, he believed it. That's all. He just believed it. He was justified by believing God's promise. And that makes salvation a grace gift. It's no different than when God comes to you and says, here's My promise, if you'll believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, I'll grant to you eternal life. And you say, by faith I receive that gift. That's all, that's what Abraham did. God said, here's a promise, if you'll believe that promise and demonstrate your faith by acting on it, I'll take away your sins and I'll redeem you and fulfill My promise. And he believed it. And so, justification is not only by faith but it is born in the grace of God.

Now, let's look at the text. Verse 13, and follow as we study it together. "For the promise that he should be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law but through the righteousness of (What?)faith." The righteousness that comes by faith. Now notice the word "the prom" or the words "the promise." What promise is this? Well, it's the Abrahamic covenant. It was given to Abraham in chapter 12. It was repeated in chapter 15, it's repeated in chapter 18, it's repeated in chapter 22. And God said to Abraham, I want you to go out of this land of Ur of the Chaldeans and I want you to go to a land that I've planned to give you and I'm going to make of you a great nation and whoever blesses you will be blessed and whoever curses you will be cursed. And

He said to him, I'm going to give you a seed like the sand of the sea and they'll number like the stars of the heaven. And you see, at that time he and Sarah didn't have any children at all, in fact she was barren. And they were already approaching 100 years old. And God gave a promise.

But Abraham saw beyond the physical posterity. He saw beyond having a son, Isaac, and Isaac having a son and Isaac's sons having sons and multiplications of nations. He saw beyond being a father of many nations. He knew that there was in that promise a spiritual reality because he had heard the promise, "In thee shall all be blessed." And so, he knew that God was talking about a spiritual promise and that's why Hebrews 11:10 says he "looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." You see, he saw a spiritual reality. Oh, he saw a physical seed, he saw a physical element, but he knew out of that physical seed would come a spiritual fulfillment.

Now, the promise is described in a marvelous way in verse 13. It says the promise to him was that he would be the heir of the world. I mean, that's a pretty...that's a pretty magnanimous promise, isn't it? To be the heir of the whole world. What an incredible statement. "Abraham, I promise you'll inherit the world." Now what is He saying? Well, what is in this massive kind of statement? Well, first of all, if we look at the promise back in Genesis we find the first element of the promise was that he would inherit the land of Canaan. Genesis 15:18 to 21 talks about that, that there was the promise of God that there would be this unique land given to him, that it would be his land, that it was the land of God's covenant and God's promise, and he would inherit that land. "The Lord made a covenant with Abram," Genesis 15:18, "unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaims, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites." It's all yours. And, by the way, the book of Joshua tells us the story of him taking possession of that promise. Abraham's descendants took the land under the direction of Joshua.

And then the promise also incorporated a nation, or a people. Not just a land but a people, a physical nation. In fact, nations, for out of Abraham came not only Israel but the Arab nations as well. In Genesis 13:16 it says, "I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth so that if a man can number the dust of the earth then shall thy seed also be numbered." He gave him a seed. And Exodus shows us the realization of the seed, the birth of the Semitic peoples and their history.

And then thirdly, inherent in the promise was the blessing of the world. Not just the land and not just a people, even nations of people, but there would be spiritual blessing. Genesis 12:3 says: "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." Now, here we come to a very important point. You've got a land, the land of Canaan. You've got a people, really the people of Israel, the covenant people. And then this huge statement about the whole world getting blessed. And he is even called, and if you look down in verse 17 of Romans 4, "the father of many nations."

How is this? How could he be the father of many nations? How can he be the heir of the world? How can one man be so significantly related to so many? The answer comes in what I think is the fourth element of the covenant; the land, the nations, the blessing of the world, and fourthly, the Redeemer. I'm convinced without a shadow of doubt that in the promise given to Abraham, he saw beyond Isaac to a Redeemer. And the reason I'm convinced of that is because that is in fact what our Lord Jesus said verbatim in John 8:56: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day and he saw it and was glad." Now I do not know how much he knew of it, but he saw the day of the Redeemer, he saw it. Maybe he saw it in the typology of the ram provided in the thicket when he would have needed to take the life of Isaac. I don't know where all he saw it but he saw the Redeemer. And the reason,

listen carefully, that Abraham could bless the world, as it were, and be the father of a world of people and inherit the world, as it were, is because there would come out of his loins a Redeemer who would redeem from all the nations and tongues and tribes and people by faith. And all those sons of faith would be the sons of Abraham.

And this, I think, is stated by Paul in Galatians 3:16. Look at it, a very important statement. And we're going to be looking back at this third chapter, so you can stick something in there to find it readily in a moment. "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made." Now listen to this. "And when He said this," when God made the promise, "He said not 'and to seeds,' (plural) as of many, but as of one and that seed is (Whom?) Christ." Now when God made the promise to Abraham, He said the ultimate promised seed is not seeds, but Christ. So, the real seed of Abraham was Christ and it is in Christ that all the people are blessed.

Look at verse 29 of the chapter, Galatians. "If you be Christ's then are you Abraham's seed and heirs according to the Abrahamic promise." Now the promise said that all the world will be blessed in you, Abraham. That could only be true because out of the loins of Abraham came the seed who is Christ and all who put their faith in Christ become one with Christ. 1 Corinthians 6:17: "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit." So we are one with the seed and thus by faith we become the spiritual seed of Abraham.

Now listen, that wasn't written for simple-minded folks. Paul tells us some very profound things. If you're still in Galatians 3 you might notice verses 8 and 9 while we're there. "The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles through faith, preached before the gospel to Abraham saying, 'In thee shall all nations be blessed.' So then they who are of faith are blessed with the man of faith, Abraham."

In other words, when it says "in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed" what does that mean? There's the commentary. It means that when you put your faith in Christ, who is the seed of Abraham, in fact that's what it says in the genealogy in Matthew 1, son of David, son of Abraham. If you put your faith in the son of Abraham, in the seed of Abraham, then you become a child of faith, and in that sense spiritually a son of Abraham, who is the model of faith for all the world.

Now listen, when you put your faith in Christ and are identified with the seed and you become an element of that seed joined to Jesus Christ, it's one seed because we're one in Christ. We then, along with Abraham (back to verse 13) inherit the world. We are the heirs of the world. I mean, it's marvelous. All of us who are in Christ are one with Christ. We are therefore the seed of Abraham by faith, the true spiritual seed. And we are part of the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham which was to inherit the world and therefore we inherit the world. Now if you have trouble with that, remember Romans chapter 8, where the Lord says that you are heirs of God and joint heirs with whom? Jesus Christ. So, as heirs of God we inherit what God grants. As joint heirs with Christ, we inherit what God grants to Christ. And what does God grant to Christ? "I will give Him the kingdoms (Of what?) of the world." So, in Christ we inherit the world.

I think Paul spells it out in 1 Corinthians 3 in a very marvelous way. First Corinthians 3:21, listen to this: "Therefore, let no man glory in men," now here it comes, this is a benediction of grandiose proportions, "for all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come. All are yours and you are Christ's and Christ is God's." See, that's really saying the same marvelous, mysterious thing. You are Christ's and Christ is God's and

everything's God's and everything's Christ's and everything's yours. Does that make you feel good? So, don't go around thinking you're a pauper. You've inherited everything God possesses and everything He will grant to Jesus Christ as His inheritance. And it all happens because when you came to Jesus Christ in faith you became one with the seed who is the seed of Abraham.

And all of this came to Abraham, it says in verse 13, not through the law but through the righteousness of faith, the righteousness of faith. And that's an important point that Paul makes over and over again,

Now, let me just give you a little footnote here. You notice the phrase "it didn't come through the law"? The "the" is not there. We call that an anarthrous construction; there's no "the" there: "through law." It didn't come to him through law. What do you mean by that? Through the law-keeping principle, through the principle of works, of keeping some rules by your own effort. It didn't come to him through ceremony, circumcision. And it didn't come to him through works, or law-keeping. It came to him as a promise, a promise. God said to him one day, "Abraham, if you get up and get out of town and go where I'm sending you, I'll do all this for you." There was no conditions. People say, "Was the Abrahamic covenant conditional?" It wasn't conditional. You just do it.

And you know, when God made covenants in those days He demonstrated the uniqueness of the covenant in a marvelous way with Abraham. The fifteenth chapter says that He was conversing with Abraham and all of a sudden He put Abraham to sleep, He just shot him with a divine anesthetic and Abraham was out.

But before Abraham was out, he had collected a series of animals and God said, now you collect these animals, the heifer, a ram, a turtledove, a pigeon, and so forth. And He said, when you collect all those animals, you take the large animals and cut them in half and you put one half of the animal over here and one half over here, another animal over here, half over here, and you don't cut the birds. Because a bird cut in half is not much left, you know. So just put one bird over here dead and one bird over here. So, you've got two dead birds and in-half animals.

Now, Abraham knew exactly what He was doing and he knew why. And then God put him to sleep and he just flopped down sleepy, sound asleep. And then a burning lamp and a smoking furnace descended and went between the pieces. You say, "What is that?" In those days, when you made a covenant with somebody, you sealed the covenant by splitting an animal in half and together you both went between the pieces. And what you were saying was: "If I break my covenant, so do to me as we have done to this animal." I would say that's a binding covenant, wouldn't you? But when God made the covenant with Abraham, He didn't let Abraham go between the pieces because the covenant was never with God and Abraham, it was with God and God. And God said, "Here's My promise, I make this promise to you. And it doesn't depend on anything you do, only that by faith you believe it." And therefore faith cannot be a meritorious work; it is only an instrument to receive a promise. And so he was not made the heir of the world because he had earned it. God didn't look down and say, "Look at that fellow go! Is he something? I mean, he's so righteous I'm going to give him the world." No. It came not through the law but through the righteousness of faith.

Now, I might add as a footnote here that we look at Galatians 3 again because it's really important. Galatians 3, verse 10 says: "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse." Now you see, if you want to...you know, think you can do works to get to God, you're under a curse. You're not under a promise, you're under a curse. Why? Because, "Cursed is everyone that

continues not in all things written in the book of the law to do them." I mean, if you want to come to God by works then you've got to do all of them and never break them, right? I mean, if you're going to be under the law then you must keep every element of the law or you are cursed. That's why verse 11 says: "No man is made right with God by the law, that is evident." Why? Because nobody can keep all the law. And that's why it says the just shall live by what? By faith. And the law is not faith. In other words, the two are mutually exclusive and antithetical. The man that does them shall live in them. In other words, if you are going to try to come to God by keeping the law, you have to keep it perfectly. That's the only way you'll survive.

But verse 13 says Christ came along and redeemed us from the curse of the law. Why? Verse 14, "In order that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles." And what is the blessing of Abraham? That God gave him a promise and said you can have it not by law but by what? By faith.

Now, look at verse 17, Galatians 3, "And this I say," and here's this major argument that Paul makes to the Galatians, "this I say, that the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, the law, which was 430 years after (Abraham) cannot annul, that it should make the promise of no effect." Now just take this out of that verse: The law came 430 years after the promise. And that, by the way, is 430 years after the last statement of the promise, not the first, but the last recorded in Genesis; 430 years later came the Mosaic law. And this whole argument just flows through Galatians. You go back to 2:21, "I do not make void the grace of God, for if righteousness came by the law then Christ is dead in vain," the whole cross is ridiculous. And then 3:1: "Foolish Galatians, who bewitched you that you should not obey the truth?" Verse 2 he says: "Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law?" What are you doing fooling around with the law? And then he flows all the way down and finally to verse 17 and he says that it was 430 years after Abraham and the final statement of the covenant that the law was given. And then verse 18 says: "For if the inheritance be of the law then it can't be a promise but God gave it to Abraham (By what?) by promise." By promise. By the way, the word "gave" *charizomai*, it has the idea of giving something for good, permanently. It's in the perfect tense. He gave it and it stays given. And if it was the law it couldn't have been a promise.

It's still the same, beloved. God gives us the promise of salvation and it is a promise to be received by faith. Now Paul himself had tried awfully hard to be saved by the law, hadn't he? He said: As touching the law, he was blameless and he was a Pharisee of the Pharisees and he was of the tribe of Benjamin, he was circumcised the eighth day, and on and on and on. And then in Philippians 4 he says, "And I counted all that as manure." Because if that's all I had I was stuck by my own righteousness and damned by it. But I exchanged the whole thing for the righteousness of Christ which is mine by faith.

Now go back to Romans, and hope that helped, just that little digression. But he says (now let's go back to verse 13), "It comes to the righteousness of faith." And by the way, it's sort of elliptical, that is it's a dot-dot-dot kind of thing, there's something left out there: "Through the righteousness received by faith." And that's why it can't be law. So, as he moves ahead you'll see that unfold, particularly in verse 15. But let's look at verse 14, follow his argument: "For if they who are of the law be heirs then faith is made void." In other words, if you have to keep God's law to be an heir, then faith is nullified, right? You can't have both. Faith is made void and the promise is of no effect at all. I mean, God's just blowing wind when he makes a promise. If the original condition is law then faith is void, the promise is useless, everything collapses.

And that's really where the Pharisees were. They believed that everything hinged on the law, really

sad. "If (look at the beginning of verse 14) they who are of the law be heirs" and that's what the Pharisees were, the people of the law, they were the law-keepers, the legalists. If they're the heirs, the whole thing collapses. Everything is void.

One commentator said this and I thought it was well said. He said, "Faith is able to receive anything that God promises. But if the allotment is to be enjoyed by means of a law which Abraham had not and which none of his children ever kept or any other law, then faith is cancelled and a promise with an impossible condition is nullified." So, the law can never bring the promise because men can't keep the law. So, if legalism was ever the way to get saved, then everybody's damned and the whole Bible makes no sense at all.

Now why? Why can't the law save? You know, there are a lot of people who say: Well, God gave all these rules, I keep the Ten Commandments and I think if you try to keep the Ten Commandments you're going to be alright. Many people believe that. If you just try to do your best and do good and keep the Ten Commandments, everything is going to be fine. The law will get us in.

But, look what verse 15 says. Here's the reason the law can't save you, because the law works wrath. You see, all the law does is work wrath. It incites wrath, it brings not life but death. Now I could tell you sort of how to see this verse. The law works wrath and then he says: "For where no law is there is no transgression." Now all the law does is show you how bad you are, right? When he says the law...without the law there's no transgression, that's pretty obvious. If you don't have any rules you can't break any, right? I mean, if you don't have rules you can't break them. So, as soon as God puts the law down it just manifests transgression and transgression leads to what? Wrath, God's wrath. So, as soon as God gives a law, it just reveals the evil of the human heart. It just makes manifest the sinfulness of man.

Do you remember the text that we'll look at in some days ahead, in Romans 7? He says, "I had not known (in verse 7) I had not known sin but by the law." I didn't know that I was coveting except the law said you shall not covet. He says: "I was alive apart from the law." When I didn't know the rules, boy, I was really living. And as soon as somebody told me the rules, I died. I mean, I knew I was breaking them. And he said: "The commandment which was ordained to life I found to be unto death. For sin, taking the occasion by the commandment, deceived me and slew me." Now he says there's nothing wrong with the law, the law is holy, just and good. It's just the problem that as soon as the law is revealed to me I see my inability to keep the law, so the law simply manifests transgression and works wrath. It puts people under the condemnation of God. In fact, in Galatians again, there's so many verses that are parallel in Galatians 3, verse 19: "Wherefore then serves the law?" In other words, what's the point of the law? Paul says to the Galatians. If you can't get saved by the law, what's the point? Listen to what he says, Galatians 3:19, "It was added because of transgressions until the seed should come to whom the promise was made." It was added to manifest the evil of the heart to prepare men for the coming seed, who was Christ. You see, the law just demonstrates our sin. It shows how vile we really are.

In fact, verse 24 says, in Galatians 3, "The law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ that we might be justified by faith." In other words, it was to rap us on the knuckles, to swat us, to show us how evil we were, to bring us under wrath, that having the fear of God's wrath we might repent and come to the Savior in faith.

Now listen, verse 16, here comes the real locus crucis of the text. If it was a promise not through the

law but through the righteousness of faith, and if the law only works wrath, therefore it is of faith that it might be by grace to the end that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not to that only which is of the law but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.

Now, that sounds like kind of a confusing verse, but listen how easily it unfolds. Here is the goal of all that Paul has said, If you're not saved by circumcision, by some ritual act, if you're not saved by keeping some rules, keeping some law, if that's true, then salvation is by faith through grace. You say, "Is that important?" Sure, because if you're saved by grace who gets the glory? God does. That's true, but that's not what this text says. Paul's not focusing on the glory of God here; he's focusing on something else. He says it's by grace to the end that God may be glorified? No, although that's true, but to the end that the promise might be sure to all the seed.

Now you say, "What is he saying?" He's saying this, listen. If salvation is by grace through faith then the promise is available to everybody who will constitute the redeemed seed. Look at it the other way. If salvation is only available to those who keep the law, then who is it available to? Nobody. But what he's saying is, if it's of faith and grace, the result is that it's available to everybody, because nobody is disqualified by their sin. Do you understand that? Isn't that great? And then he splits them into two categories. First, not only to that which is of the law. Who would that be? Who were the people of the law? The Jews. The term "of the law" is the same idea back in verse 12 when the Jews there are called "of the circumcision." Those who are identifying with the keeping of the law. It's available to the Jew and then to that also which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all. And that has to do with believing Gentiles. You say, "You mean the faith of Abraham is the Gentile faith?" Sure. Was Abraham a Jew? No. Abraham was a Chaldean Gentile. That is a shocker for many Jewish people, by the way. But he was a Chaldean Gentile. He had no Mosaic orientation. He lived and died before that all came to pass. He came by faith, and so he illustrates believing Gentiles. So, Paul says, look, if salvation's by faith and grace, then it's available to everybody, whether you're of the law or like Abraham, you're just a believing Gentile. Abraham becomes the father of all of us by his faith. We're all children of Abraham by faith. Now that is not to say that he doesn't have a physical seed in Israel, he does. But the message here has to do with the spiritual seed.

Just as it was written, verse 17, I've made thee a father of many nations. And that's, of course, a restatement of Genesis 12, the covenant. So, that's the way God intended it. He intended that Abraham would be the father of many nations. What that means is a spiritual promise, and that many peoples and tongues and tribes and nations all over the world and throughout history would come to God through faith in His Messiah, and those people would become the spiritual children of Abraham. He is our father. That is, he is the model of faith that we all follow. He is the original example of faith that we all follow. So it was in the eternal purpose of God that Abraham was designed to be the spiritual prototype of all who come to God by faith. He heard God's promise. He received it by faith. He was an unworthy, ungodly sinner who by grace was given a promise which he believed. And the beautiful sum of it all, look at verse 17: "Before Him whom he believed, even God, who giveth life to the dead and calleth those things which are not as though they were." He believed in God. That's what it's saying in verse 17. Abraham, who is the father of us all, skip the parenthesis, before Him whom he believed, even God.

All of us, like Abraham, believing God enter in to that spiritual seed who is Christ. And he qualifies what God. Not just any God and he gives two qualifications: the God who gives life to the dead. And no one knew that better than Abraham because he and Sarah were barren. And no one knew that better than Abraham because he was willing to sacrifice Isaac, wasn't he? Because what did he

believe in his heart? Hebrews 11, that God was able to do what? Raise him from the dead. He believed in the God who raises the dead. And that speaks of the power of God. And also, the God who calls those things which are not as though they were. You say, "What's that?" Well, that is, I believe, particularly speaking of God's creative power. But if you look at it more closely it says calling those things which are not as though they were. That's creative power. He calls things which don't even exist as if they did exist and brings them into existence.

But it also, I think more pointedly, speaks to God's ability to create events, to create history, to chart the course of the world. He is the sovereign who calls the people, the places, the events into existence, and the calling here is an effectual divine determination. He is the God who gives life to the dead, that's His power. And He is the God who calls things which are not as though they were. He calls things into existence. That is His absolute, ultimate sovereignty. All-powerful, sovereign God is the God in whom Abraham believes.

Well, you have a great promise, people. God says, I'll give you the world. Jesus said to the disciples, I'll give you the kingdom. He said to us, I'll give you My throne, you'll sit in it with Me. I'll give you the world. I'll give you heaven. I'll give you eternity. You'll inherit everything.

You say, "But how?" Well, it's a promise and you receive it by faith and it's offered to you by grace. "Well, what do I have to do?" You have to abandon your doing and receive it by faith.

I want to close with this. John Bunyan. I don't know if you ever read *The Holy War* by John Bunyan, but from time to time I read passages from it and it always speaks to my heart, beautiful, beautiful allegory. And let me just read this in conclusion. I think it will be worthy of our thought. The Prince Emmanuel is Christ. The town of Mansoul symbolizes the heart of an individual:

"The Prince ordered a delegation of prisoners to be sent from the town of Mansoul under the guard of Captain Boanerges and Captain Conviction. They were brought into the presence of the Prince in mourning robes with ropes around their necks, smiting upon their breasts and derst not so much as lift their eyes up to heaven. Nor could they hold their peace, but they cried, 'O wretched men of Mansoul, O unhappy men.' Then they fell prostrate upon their faces before the Prince. He ascended the throne and ordered the representatives to stand up before him. He asked them if they were servants of Shaddai or had they suffered themselves to be corrupted and defiled by the abominable Diabolis. Would they have been content to have lived under such slavery and tyranny forever? And even when he came himself against the town of Mansoul, did they not wish that he might gain a victory over them? To all these questions they replied, 'Yes, we've done worse. We deserve punishment and even death. We have nothing to say, Lord. Thou art just, for we have sinned.'

"Then the Prince commanded that an herald should be called and he should go throughout the camp of Emmanuel and proclaim with the sound of a trumpet that the Prince had in his Father's name and for his Father's glory gotten a perfect conquest and victory over Mansoul and that the prisoners should follow and say amen. Then there was great rejoicing everywhere among the soldiers and captains of Prince Emmanuel's army. But in the hearts of the men of Mansoul this great joy was lacking. But the Prince called them to him again and said to them the sins and trespasses and iniquities that you with the whole town of Mansoul have from time to time committed against my Father and me, I have power and commandment from my Father to forgive to the town of Mansoul and I do forgive you accordingly.

“Having said this he gave them a written parchment and sealed with several seals a large and general pardon to be proclaimed throughout the whole town of Mansoul at the rising of the sun the next day. The mourning weeds were stripped from them and he gave them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning and the garments of praise for the spirit of heaviness. He gave to them each jewels of gold and precious stones and took away their ropes and put chains of gold about their necks and earrings in their ears and then were the fetters broke to pieces before their faces and cast into the air.

“So overjoyed were they with forgiveness, their pardon being so sudden and glorious, they almost fainted. But the Prince put his everlasting arms under them, embraced them and kissed them and bade them be of good cheer. Then he sent them away to their homes with pipe and tabor, music. Joyful was the meeting of those that had gone down prisoners with friends on their return and when they heard the wonderful news of the wisdom and grace of Prince Emmanuel, their joy knew no bounds. There was pardon for everyone in Mansoul. Each one was mentioned by name. Emmanuel came with royal retinue and took up his abode in the town. He made them a great feast in the palace. He gave them luxuries from his Father's court. And men did eat angel's food and had honey given to them out of the rock.”

And I think Bunyan captures the message, doesn't he? Prince Emmanuel offers you the same forgiveness, the same freedom from your chains, and it is as easy and as difficult as an act of faith that receives a promise of forgiveness in Christ. Let's bow together.

Just in the parting moments, and my heart has been so blessed to consider again the greatness of our salvation. I hope yours has as well. But at the same time I'm aware of many folks who may not know Christ and I just call out to you as Prince Emmanuel did to the town of Mansoul, which represents humanity, I have gotten the victory, the pardon has been won, forgiveness for your sins, trespasses and iniquities has already been offered if you will but receive the gift. It is a promise given by grace to be received by faith.

Do you believe? Do you believe that Jesus Christ died and rose again for you? Will you receive Him by an act of faith and even that is a gift of God. Will you open your heart to Him?

Father, we do pray that You will bring those that You would desire to come and that You'll search every heart, Lord, and show us what You've done with a clearer vision than ever we've seen. And even those of us who have known You for a long time, give us new found joy for such a salvation for Christ's sake. Amen.

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