

Sons of Abraham Part 4

TEXT: GALATIANS 3:6-14

February 28, 2010

REVIEW/INTRODUCTION:

In Galatians 3:6-14, Paul appeals to the OT Scriptures and uses Abraham as a “test-case” to confirm his thesis in 2:16, namely that justification is by faith alone apart from the works of the law (v. 6- Gen. 15:6; v. 8- Gen. 12:3; v. 10- Deut. 27:26; v. 11- Hab. 2:4; v. 12- Lev. 18:5; v. 13- Deut. 21:23).

In vv. 6-9, Paul begins by setting forth 3 arguments, which demonstrate that the blessing of justification comes through faith alone apart from works of the law. He reveals how faith alone is the pathway to a blessed life (i.e., to be declared by God just-as-if-I’d-never-sinned and just-as-if-I’d-always-obeyed).

The first argument Paul offers is in v. 6.

I. ABRAHAM WAS JUSTIFIED AS AN UNCIRCUMCISED GENTILE. V. 6

Paul’s second argument is in vv. 7, 9.

II. SONSHIP IS NOT PHYSICAL BUT SPIRITUAL. VV. 7, 9

By answering who are the Sons of Abraham, Paul is really asking who does God accept and on what basis (cf. Fung, *Galatians*, p. 137)? Paul’s opponents took great pride in and boasted of their physical descent from Abraham.

They gloried in their reception of circumcision and observance of the Law. Because of their physical descent and circumcision they believed themselves to be entitled to the grace of God. Such was their supreme confidence, boast and ground of justification.

Yet, we learned from John the Baptist, Jesus and Paul, that circumcision was a reminder that physical descent wasn’t sufficient to make one acceptable to God (a true Israelite). Circumcision pointed to the fact that the uncleanness and disqualification of our sinful nature must be taken away (see Vos, *Biblical Theology*, p. 90). Circumcision served as a sign of justification. It was an outward sign that an inward work of God had taken place (cf. Gen. 17:11; Rom. 4:9-12; see Deut. 10:14-16; Jer. 4:4).

It follows then since Abraham was justified as an uncircumcised Gentile, it is evident that the true sons of Abraham are not his physical sons but rather sons according to faith (Gal. 3:7; cf. Rom. 4:11-16). Those who hear the gospel and believe- just like Abraham- are Abraham’s true children.

This brings us to Paul's third argument in v. 8:

LESSON:

III. JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE HAS ALWAYS BEEN GOD'S METHOD OF SALVATION FOR SINNERS. V. 8

Here Paul reveals how the doctrine of *Sola Fide* (justification by faith alone) was implied and anticipated in God's promise to Abraham (Fung, *Galatians*, p. 140).

Paul's quotation of the OT in v. 8 goes past Genesis 15 to Genesis 12:3 where God first announced His promise to Abraham (it is repeated in Gen. 18:18; 22:18). Paul recognized that God's promise to Abraham was an announcement of the gospel in advance (see Fung, *Galatians*, p. 139).

He not only understood that the OT *predicted* the *coming* of Jesus as the Savior of the world but he also understood how the OT *anticipated* the *method* by which he would save (i.e., justifying sinners by faith, just like Abraham, Ryken, *Galatians*, p. 103).

Justification by faith alone has always rested at the heart of God's plan of salvation for sinners. Paul's argument in v. 8 highlights several important points concerning the Bible in regard to its message and authority. We will begin first with the Bible's message.

A. THE BIBLE'S MESSAGE

If someone were to ask you, "What is the message of the Bible? What is it about?" how would you answer?

A common question that people often struggle with is how OT people were saved. It is not uncommon for people to think that law keeping/offering sacrifices saved OT believers and trusting in Christ saves NT believers.

Yet, Paul argues in v. 8 that there have never been two methods of salvation, one for the Jews (law) and one for the Gentiles (faith). God doesn't have different plans and futures for Jews and Gentiles (cf. Eph. 2:14).

For others, the Bible is primarily a book of rules/ethics that tell you what to do and not to do. Still, others view the Bible as containing a lot of disconnected stories about heroes that provide moral examples for us to pattern our lives after or to avoid (cf. 1 Cor. 10:6).

The Bible certainly contains rules that tell us what to and what not to do. It also sets forth a number of "examples" from which we can learn important lessons. Yet, none of these things constitute the essence of what the Bible is about.

What then is the Bible about? What is its primary message?

First, we need to understand that even though the Bible was written over a span of 1500 years by over 40 authors on three different continents in three different languages from diverse cultural settings and even though it contains 66 books with a variety of subjects and literary forms, it is essentially one book, with one author and one main message.

This is where Paul's letter to the Galatians becomes so helpful to us. It helps us to understand how Paul (the apostles) preached the gospel using the Old Testament as their Scriptures (see Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, p. 82).

Galatians provides us with a bird's-eye view of the Bible. Or, to quote the title of a very helpful book, Galatians gives to us *God's Big Picture*. Paul's letter traces for us the underlying storyline of redemption in the Bible. It lays out a clear explanation of the unity in the unfolding plan of redemption that runs from Genesis to Revelation.

What then is this underlying, unifying, unfolding message of the Bible?

Paul reveals it in Galatians 3:8, where he quotes Genesis 12:3 and says, "the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham."

The underlying, unifying, unfolding message of the Bible is the good news that God announced (preached) to Abraham. What was the good news announced to Abraham?

Paul tells us in v. 8. The good news was that God would declare all people, Jew and Gentile, righteous on the basis of faith alone.

This message, Paul argues, runs from Abraham to Christ. Contrary to the Judaizers, no man has ever been justified by keeping the Law. Paul will later explain in 3:17 that the Law came 430 years after the covenant God made with Abraham! Abraham was justified without any knowledge that he couldn't eat shrimp! The inheritance (i.e., the blessing promised by God), Paul says in Gal. 3:18, comes not by way of law keeping but by God's promise!

Justification by grace through faith alone has always been God's method of salvation (blessing) for all people in all times.

Now, it may come as a surprise for some of you to learn that this unfolding message goes further back than Abraham. It really begins in Genesis 3:15.

1. GENESIS 3:15- THE FIRST ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE GOSPEL

Adam and Eve's disobedience resulted in God's judgment. Yet, almost immediately after their Fall God makes a gracious promise. In Genesis 3:15, He announces that the seed of the woman would crush the seed of the serpent.

Genesis 3:15 is sometimes referred to as the “*Protoevangelium*,” the first announcement of the gospel. This is because through the woman’s seed God, by His grace and power, promises that a human being, a son of Eve, will destroy the serpent (i.e., the devil).

Paul alludes to this prophetic promise in Romans 16:20, “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet,” (see also Gal. 4:4).

And so the enmity between the snake’s offspring and the woman’s offspring foreshadows the conflict between Christ and Satan. It is important to note that even though the *object* of Adam and Eve’s faith was less specific than ours, the *essence* of their faith was the same (see Vos, *Biblical Theology*, p. 44). Adam and Eve trusted in God’s promise, grace and power to bring deliverance from sin (Vos, *Biblical Theology*, p. 44).

As God’s story of redemption progressively unfolds the promise God made to Adam and Eve is more clearly revealed in the covenant God made with Abraham.

2. GENESIS 12:1-3: THE COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM

God’s covenant with Abraham (unilateral and unconditional) is first announced in Genesis 12:1-3. In Genesis 15, God confirms and ratifies His covenant as He passes between the severed animals. God’s passing through the severed animals signified the calling down of judgment on Himself if He failed to fulfill His promises (see Vos, *Biblical Theology*, p. 86).

The promises God makes to Abraham are of immense significance. Genesis 12:1-3 governs the rest of the Bible.

John Stott writes, “It may truly be said without exaggeration that not only the rest of the Old Testament but the whole of the New Testament are an outworking of these promises,” (*Understanding the Bible*, p. 51).

Mark Dever writes, “...the most crucial event in the Bible between the fall of Adam and the birth of Christ occurs in Genesis 12...The Lord calls Abram (12:1-3). This call sets off the story of the rest of the Bible,” (*The Message of the Old Testament*, p. 75).

In Galatians 3:8, Paul shows how God’s unfolding plan of redemption centers on the promises God made to Abraham and how they are fulfilled in Christ. He reinforces to the Galatians (and us!) the unifying message of the Bible, which is:

God justifies the ungodly by grace through faith alone.

This unifying message runs from Adam and Eve, to Abraham and on to its ultimate fulfillment and fullest expression in Jesus Christ.

3. LUKE 24:27- JESUS CHRIST IN ALL THE SCRIPTURES

The God of the gospel is one God who has acted in one way and announced one message in order to bring salvation to all the nations of the world (see Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible As Christian Scripture*, p. 67).

The Bible then is primarily about God as He progressively reveals Himself in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

In Hebrews 1:1-2, the author says that Jesus is God's word for the "last days." That is to say, Jesus brings the word of the Old Testament prophets to completion. He is the fulfillment of all the promises of the OT. He is the final and fullest expression.

The promises first given to Adam and Eve progress until the fullest meaning of them is revealed in Christ. Christ, Himself, made this very claim.

In Luke 24:27, Luke writes, "²⁷ beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself..."

As Jesus was walking on the road to Emmaus, He led two believers in the greatest Biblical theology lesson ever given!

A bit later, when Jesus was with His disciples, He refers them to the three main divisions of the Hebrew Bible (i.e., the entire OT) and says to them, "⁴⁴ These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."

In John 5:39, Jesus speaking of the OT, said to the Jews, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me..."

Paul repeatedly showed how the OT Scriptures pointed to Jesus. In Romans 1:1-2, Paul writes, "¹ Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ² which He promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures..." (see also 16:26).

In Romans 3:21-22, Paul clearly states that the OT taught justification by faith alone, "²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe."

In 2 Timothy 3:15, Paul directs Timothy to the OT Scriptures and reminds him how he "had been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. "

CONCLUSION:

The fact that the Bible is one book, with one author and one message has vital implications for the way we read it, understand it and teach it.

1. FIRST, WE MUST NOT VIEW THE BIBLE AS PRIMARILY A RULEBOOK TO FOLLOW TO HELP US LIVE MORALLY DECENT BUT GOSPELLESS LIVES.

One of the biggest mistakes believers make is to read the commands of Scripture without any reference to the gospel. Justification is never set forth in Scripture as the reward for moral behavior. Rather, it is a gift of grace. All the ethical and moral commands in the Bible are given as implications of the gospel.

Thus, viewing the Bible as largely a rulebook to follow in order to overcome our problems or to become better people is to leave the impression that the essence of the Bible's message and the Christian faith is what we do for God rather than what God has done in Christ for us.

2. SECOND, WE MUST NOT VIEW OR READ THE BIBLE AS A BOOK OF ISOLATED SAYINGS AND DISCONNECTED MORAL STORIES.

The miracles of the OT (e.g., The Exodus and Red Sea Crossing), all the stories of the OT (Abraham, David and Goliath, Samson, Daniel in the Lions Den), the seemingly pointless listing of genealogies in Chronicles (1 Chron. 1-9) and the mundane day-to-day accounts of people's lives, all serve to show how the Lord kept His promises to His people, despite their ongoing failure and faithlessness.

We must understand and read the Bible as presenting one unfolding story of God's plan to justify sinners by grace alone, through faith alone in His Son Jesus Christ alone.

Again, even though the *object* of Abraham's faith was less specific than ours, the *essence* of his faith was the same (see Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, p. 55, 64-65). Abraham trusted in God who made promises to him and God counted Abraham as righteous on the basis of faith and not works (see Vos, *Biblical Theology*, pp. 84-85, pp. 86-87).

Vos notes, "The keynote is not what Abraham has to do for God, but what God will do for Abraham," (*Biblical Theology*, p. 80).

God made gracious promises to Abraham. In response, Abraham believed and the Scripture says that God counted it to him as righteousness. Abraham was justified not on the basis of his personal morality and performance but by his faith in God, who made promises to Him.

This is the message that runs throughout all of Scripture. Sinful, fallen humans can never earn God's acceptance by their performance. The only hope for fallen sinners everywhere is to trust in Christ as He is fully revealed in the gospel.

The promise that was made to Abraham has now been finally fulfilled and fully expressed in the person and work of Jesus Christ. What a joy to know that we, as well as all people, are blessed (justified) not because of what we “Do” but because of what He has “Done!”

In 2 Corinthians 1:20 Paul says to the Corinthians, “For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.” What a joy and comfort to know that all of God’s promises that we have looked at this morning find their yes in Christ! “He who calls you is faithful; He will surely do it,” (1 Thess. 5:24).

Thus, like Paul in Galatians 1:5, we say to “our God and Father...be the glory forever and ever. Amen.”

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