

I love this country. I have lived in Japan and visited many countries, but there is no place like America. That is because of our Christian heritage. We are still reaping the benefits of being founded on godly principles. The nation's founders were people seeking religious freedom. But that liberty is under assault today. It has been under assault since the turn of the previous century, but it is coming to a head in our own day. The meaning of terms is flipped upside down. The law is being applied with prejudice. Lady justice has taken off her blindfold. Corruption and greed are running rampant in clever ways that skirt the law. Our borders have been flung open, and the money presses can't keep up with all the spending, which is borrowing from our grandchildren. Fatherless homes are an epidemic. Crime is surging. When as a nation we forsake the Lord, He will give us over to the consequences of our actions (Psalm 9:17ⁱ). **The only possible remedy is to return to Him (Proverbs 14:34ⁱⁱ)**. The public message from entertainment, media, education, and even many churches feeds the self-centered narrative. It all really comes down to the message to the Galatians that we are studying. Can we be righteous on our own? Can we be good enough for God? And in our day, we have taken it a step further. Can we reject God's standards and tell God what righteousness is? That is the secular assault on faith in Jesus. And then there is the religious misdirection as well.

Dennis Prager is a Jew who has a very popular podcast: Fireside Chats. He gives conservative commentary on the current culture and takes email questions. One question put to him was, "How do you experience God?" His answer was that he strives to please God every day. He also stated that he had a hard time loving God because of all the suffering in the world. Though he knew it was from the fall of mankind, he said that it still goes back to God making man anyway. Surely, as a good Jew, he knows and daily recites the Shema. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength (Deuteronomy 6:5ⁱⁱⁱ). Without the cross of Jesus and redemption He brings, the creation of man doesn't make sense!

Secular Jews are not alone in this misdirection. An evangelist we contribute to does surveys as a way to share the Gospel. Reading summaries of his interviews, I would guess that about 95% of those he speaks with have some religious experience and yet they expect to get to heaven by being good. Paul's gospel of grace has somehow been replaced with the bad news of "You can do it if you try hard enough!" This is what Paul is addressing. His audience was religious, in fact they received the message of Jesus. But when the Jewish Christians came and preached that they had to keep the Jewish laws to be saved, they readily accepted it (Galatians 1:6^{iv}).

I'm going back over verse five as it ends halfway through a sentence. ⁵ *Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith—* ⁶ *just as Abraham "believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"?* Galatians 3:5-9 He asked, "Did God supply the Holy Spirit to your lives because you obeyed all the Jewish laws? Did He work miracles because you kept all the religious rules meant for the Jewish nation?" They would have known that was not the case because they had not been trying to keep them until just recently. Paul is using the Socratic method which was common with rabbis. By asking the right questions a listener can be led to the right conclusions. Paul is asking them to carefully consider how God worked in their lives in the past and to ask themselves if grace was given to them because

they got better at obeying the laws of Moses or if it was a result of their faith in God. The answer was obvious. It was exposing the misdirection of the Judaizers.

Dear fellow believer, if you are experiencing life in Christ, His joy in your heart, communion with Him in prayer, a new passion to please God in all you do, and fellowship with believers, I would ask if that was because you have been sinless? It is a similar question to Paul's question to the Galatians. Does God relate to us and direct our lives because we finally got it all together or because He is gracious? You know the answer. **All we do is apply faith to what we hear from His Word (Hebrews 4:2^v). And even that faith is a gift of God's grace.**

As always, Paul backs up His point by referring to Scripture. Brothers and sisters, if we want to proclaim the truth, we need to know the Scriptures. There are Bibles everywhere. I have half a dozen printed Bibles and twenty versions in my laptop, but there is a famine today for hearing the Word of God (Amos 8:11^{vi}). Visitors to our church from all over the nation tell me they cannot find a church in their community that just expounds on the Word of God. No wonder the nation is vulnerable to the crazy teachings that are beginning to dominate the culture. The Word of God is truth (John 17:17^{vii}).

Paul points in verse 6 to Abraham again as an illustration of salvation by faith alone. He is quoting Genesis 15, so let us go there and read what Paul is referring to.

¹ After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." ² But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" ³ And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir." ⁴ And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." ⁵ And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." ⁶ And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness. Genesis 15:1-6 God came to Abram in a vision. He told Him not to fear. Abram and his allies had just defeated five kings that ransacked Sodom and took his nephew captive. Abram was probably fearful of retaliation. That is why God told him not to fear. God declared Himself to be Abram's shield. He would protect Him. Then God said He is Abram's reward. That is because Abram would not take any of the spoils of the battle (Genesis 14:22-24^{viii}). He did not want any corruption that was from Sodom. In response to that, God gave Abram the greatest reward one can have. He gave Himself. That is illustrated in the covenant in the last half of that chapter. He is *our* reward by faith. Jesus is ours (Song of Songs 6:3^{ix})!

Abram responded to that incredible promise with what was on his heart. I think that is a good example for us. It sounds like a complaint, but God already sees our heart, so you might as well be honest with Him. Abram wanted an heir. His wealth and legacy would go to his chief servant if he did not have a child. God told Abram to look at the stars. There were so many he could not count them. And God said that that is how many offspring he would have. In other words, Abram and Sarah would miraculously have a child in their old age and from him would come thousands upon thousands of descendants. Abram believed the LORD. God counted that belief as righteousness.

Later when was asked to sacrifice Isaac (Genesis 22:2^x), Abraham surmised that if he sacrificed Isaac God would have to keep His promise of making him the father of a multitude by resurrecting him (Hebrews 11:19^{xi}). God stopped Abraham as the knife was

about come down on Isaac. Abraham had proven he truly believed God's promise. It was evidence of his faith in God's Word by which he was counted as righteous. It was his actions that gave evidence of his faith (James 2:18^{xiii}).

God says to us today, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved (Acts 16:31^{xiii}). Do you believe what God says? Or do you, like most people, say, "But I think I can be good enough to have a good chance of getting into heaven." What we so easily overlook is the depravity of our own hearts and the holiness of God. God made it so simple for us because He loves us all, the simplest to the most intellectual. All you must do is face the fact that you cannot be good enough for God. If all restraints and consequences were removed from our lives, what kind of things would we do? That is a scary thought! We are starting to see it in communities that release people without bail or refuse to incarcerate people for crimes.

And if we could see the holiness of God like Isaiah did, we would be on our face in the dirt shaking with disgust at how far short we fall from that perfection and love as we recognized what we deserve (Isaiah 6:5^{xiv}). That is why God sent Jesus to take our sins upon Himself and the penalty that we deserve. If you believe and accept it, it will be counted to you as righteousness too.

Abraham lived four hundred years before the law was given. His faith in God's declaration to him had nothing to do with the law or with circumcision that came two chapters later (Romans 4:1-5^{xv}). That is Paul's point to the Galatians. Abraham believed God and it was counted to Him as righteousness. That is how we are saved as well. Works of the law will add nothing to it. But evidence of your faith will be seen in all you do (James 2:17,18^{xvi}). "Faith alone saves, but faith that saves is not alone."^{xvii}

⁷ *Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.* Galatians 3:7 Experience alone is not enough. We take our experiences to Scripture to test our interpretation of our experiences. Abraham is not only the father of the Jews, but of all who believe God by faith as he did. Before God called him, he was a pagan in Ur. He then heard and obeyed the Spirit by faith. (See verse 29^{xviii}, Romans 9:30-32^{xix}). If God can do that with him, why not anyone anywhere at any time? God shows no partiality (Acts 10:34^{xx}). Can He reach a Muslim in Tunisia? How about an animist in the Amazon or a Buddhist in Nepal? I have heard accounts of all the above having a revelation of Jesus. God works the same today because He is the same God who reached out to Abraham. Those of faith are the sons of Abraham (Galatians 3:29^{xxi}).

Why is it such a big deal to be a son of Abraham? Jews, Christians, and Muslims think it is a big deal because they want to be heirs of the promises to Abraham. Many of them do not even understand what that means. It is the blessing that came through Abraham's seed, and that seed is Jesus. Even knowing that, they do not understand why that is so special. That is because we have lost the sense of what sin is and how destructive it is.

Our own culture is at war over this. One side is saying there is no such thing and that some acts the Bible declares to be sin should be embraced by all as normal. It is normal to a fallen world. But the results of sin are all the pain and suffering in the world including death and man's inhumanity to man. The world wants to blame it on God or claim it is proof there is no God. In fact, it is proof that the Bible is completely accurate when it describes man's heart as desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9^{xxii}). In addition to all the suffering we bring upon one another, the fall of mankind affected the planet as well,

so that we have diseases and natural disasters. Jesus is the answer to all this. Becoming a son or daughter of Abraham pulls us out of the cycle of sin and brings us into the kingdom of God. That changes not only the way we live presently giving us meaning and purpose but also gives us the promise of returning to a perfect world (Revelation 22:3,4^{xxiii}).

The Judaizers' desire to have converts obey the law came from the idea that only the physical descendants are heirs of Abraham and only them and those who are adopted into the family by obedience to the law will be saved. But Paul is saying that only the people of faith are Abraham's heirs. That was a radical new interpretation based on the way Abraham was adopted into God's family.

One might ask if Jonah's ministry was in vain? Nineveh repented but we have no evidence they knew the law or made any attempt to keep it. All that they heard was "Forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed!" and the people believed God (Jonah 3:4,5^{xxiv}). They repented and avoided God's judgments.

This righteousness by faith is a key doctrine of the Apostle Paul. I believe it was what was revealed to him in the deserts of Arabia during his three years of seeking the truth in the Scriptures. He teaches this in Romans 3:21 through chapter 6. He follows the pattern of Genesis. In Genesis 1 through 11, we see the creation of man, the fall, the wickedness of man increased until the flood, and even after the flood at the tower of Babel. It is a story of rebellion against our Maker. And then in chapter 12 comes Abraham in a city that worships the moon and stars. God calls him out and promises to bless the world through him. What blessing is God talking about when He promised to bless the world through him? It is the answer to all the rebellion in the heart of man mentioned in the first eleven chapters.

Paul is doing the same thing in the letter to the Romans. In chapter 1 through 3:20 he points out how wicked man is. He explains that none are righteous. He warns the religious that they better look in their hearts and see the wickedness there. Then from 3:21 through 6 he tells the answer to our condition is found in the blessing to Abraham. He describes how the blessing of forgiveness came to Abraham and David by faith. He asks, "Is God not the God of the whole world?" In other words, is God only the God of Israelites? Is He not the God of all mankind? And since He is no respecter of persons anyone can come to God in the same way that Abraham did.

Abraham's blessing to the whole world was two-fold. It was his example of obeying God by faith. Even though he was not always saintly, God counting his faith as righteousness. The second is that the promise declared that through his seed, a descendant, all the world would be blessed (Genesis 15:3^{xxv}). That seed is Jesus who made it legally possible for sins to be forgiven by taking them upon Himself and receiving the punishment justice demands, which is death (Leviticus 17:11^{xxvi}).

That is why being a son of Abraham, which is to be a child of faith, is such a huge issue for the church of Galatia and everyone else. It is the only answer to our sin debt. **Works can't add anything to it. Failures can't take anything from it.** The Judaizers were telling the Galatians to trust in obedience to the law to complete their salvation. Paul is saying that never worked and adds nothing to what Jesus did. On the contrary, it focusses back on self instead of what Jesus did for us. It rejects the blessing passed down to the people of faith.

⁸ *And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed."* Galatians 3:8 The world would be blessed in Abraham. "In you" includes not only the DNA of the ancestors of the Messiah, but also his example of being a pagan made righteous by faith. The good news is that it is not works but faith in the One who came from the line of Abraham and fulfilled the Genesis 3:15^{xxvii} promise. That promise was that a male descendant of Eve would crush the head of the serpent.

This was always God's plan and so His words to Abraham were in accord with that predetermined future. Now in our lifetime it has come to pass. All nations have people of faith in Jesus and have become Abraham's spiritual descendants. They have placed their faith in the One who came from the DNA of Eve through Abraham in the virgin Mary, a descendant of Abraham.

⁹ *So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.* Galatians 3:9 We are blessed with the same relationship with God that Abraham had, believing by faith which results in blessing and communion with God. We, like Abraham, are friends of God! We have been adopted into the family of God just as he was and in the same way that he was. He trusted God to make Him righteous looking forward to God's provision (Genesis 22:8^{xxviii}). We look back to that provision and trust in Jesus' atoning death on the cross. Because we have more details of how it came about does not make us any better. In fact, it took Abraham more faith because he could not see or read of how it would be made possible. Jesus came 1800 years later!

Think of how hard it would be for a pagan convicted of sin to accept that a just and holy God would somehow make you righteous in His eyes. Every day experiences would cause you to wonder if it was really possible, which is also the problem with many Christians who don't understand the power of the cross. But for those who understand that Jesus paid it all, there is the calm assurance that it is indeed finished. ¹⁰ *Steadfast love and faithfulness meet; righteousness and peace kiss each other.* Psalm 85:10

We are blessed! If you have faith in Christ, you need to realize how blessed you are. There is no good thing God will withhold from you (Romans 8:32^{xxix})! We can say with Job, ²⁶ *And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God,* ²⁷ *whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.* Job 19:26-27

By faith we are children of the King, the bride of Christ, on our way to the wedding feast of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7^{xxx}), to behold with our transformed eyes the wonder of the glory of God, and with our transformed ears to hear the seraphim sing His praises, and our perfected vocal cords to sing in perfect harmony with them out of the overflowing joy from our hearts!

Questions:

- 1 What is the only hope for the nation? See Proverbs 14:34
- 2 Did Christ come into your life because you are good?
- 3 How does Paul now make his case? 4 Why should we do the same?
- 5 How was Abraham made righteous? 6 How did Abraham's faith become evident?
- 7 What is the answer to the world's sin problem?
- 8 Why is it such a big deal to be a son of Abraham?
- 9 How was Nineveh saved? And you and me?
- 10 How was the world blessed through Abraham?

ⁱ Psalm 9:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ The wicked shall return to Sheol, all the nations that forget God.

ⁱⁱ Proverbs 14:34 (ESV)

³⁴ Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.

ⁱⁱⁱ Deuteronomy 6:5 (ESV)

⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

^{iv} Galatians 1:6 (ESV)

⁶ I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—

^v Hebrews 4:2 (ESV)

² For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened.

^{vi} Amos 8:11 (ESV)

¹¹ “Behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord GOD, “when I will send a famine on the land— not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD.

^{vii} John 17:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

^{viii} Genesis 14:22-24 (ESV)

²² But Abram said to the king of So dom, “I have lifted my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth, ²³ that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours, lest you should say, ‘I have made Abram rich.’ ²⁴ I will take nothing but what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me. Let Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre take their share.”

^{ix} Song of Songs 6:3 (ESV)

³ I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine; he grazes among the lilies.

^x Genesis 22:2 (ESV)

² He said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.”

^{xi} Hebrews 11:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

^{xii} James 2:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

^{xiii} Acts 16:31 (ESV)

³¹ And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”

^{xiv} Isaiah 6:5 (ESV)

⁵ And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”

^{xv} Romans 4:1-5¹ What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? ² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³ For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” ⁴ Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. ⁵ And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness,

^{xvi} James 2:17-18 (ESV)

¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. ¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

^{xvii} John Calvin

^{xviii} Galatians 3:29 (ESV)

²⁹ And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.

^{xix} Romans 9:30-32 (ESV)

³⁰ What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; ³¹ but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not

succeed in reaching that law. ³² Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone,

^{xx} **Acts 10:34 (ESV)**

³⁴ So Peter opened his mouth and said: “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality,

^{xxi} **Galatians 3:29 (ESV)**

²⁹ And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.

^{xxii} **Jeremiah 17:9 (ESV)**

⁹ The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

^{xxiii} **Revelation 22:3-4 (ESV)**

³ No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

^{xxiv} **Jonah 3:4-5 (ESV)**

⁴ Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s journey. And he called out, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” ⁵ And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.

^{xxv} **Genesis 12:3 (ESV)**

³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

^{xxvi} **Leviticus 17:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.

^{xxvii} **Genesis 3:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

^{xxviii} **Genesis 22:8 (ESV)**

⁸ Abraham said, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So they went both of them together.

^{xxix} **Romans 8:32 (ESV)**

³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

^{xxx} **Revelation 19:7 (ESV)**

⁷ Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready;