

GALATIANS

Lesson 9

The History and Theology of Justification Galatians 3:15-18

INTRODUCTION

This last Monday I was painting at the new church building. As I was about to paint some outside doors, Hal Demarest said to me, “Jack just loves to paint.” I quickly answered, “I don’t love to paint and there are lots of things I would rather be doing than this job but someone has to do it. I don’t enjoy painting but I realize it has to be done if the building is going to get finished.”

This is the way it is with a message on the history and theology of justification. It may not be all that enjoyable but it has to be done if we are going to understand our salvation in a world and life context. This message is not designed to move your heart but your head, so you can appreciate your heritage of faith.

When most Christians think of justification they relate it only to their own standing before God. They have little or no appreciation for the history and theology behind the act of God declaring a sinner righteous.

Justification by grace through faith goes back as far as Adam and was made into a formal or definite covenant to man from God in Abraham. The whole Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, tells the story of God’s sovereign purpose of grace, His masterplan of salvation through Christ. As Christians, we need to stand back and get a panoramic picture of God’s everlasting purpose to redeem a people for Himself through Jesus Christ.

God’s plan of salvation was set forth in a covenant He made with Abraham. In this covenant, God gave some definite promises to Abraham. These promises are called the Abrahamic Covenant, and in this covenant are the promises of salvation and the promise of earthly blessing for all the seed of Abraham.

When God called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees, He promised to bestow on him and on his seed (children) a land. In Abraham’s seed all the families of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3: **“The Lord had said to Abram, “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”**”).

Abraham was promised a seed, a land and universal blessings for mankind. This universal blessing was the promise of justification for the whole world through the Messiah who would come from the physical seed of Abraham or the Jews.

In Galatians, the Apostle Paul is refuting the false teaching of the Judaizers who said that man had to be saved by keeping the Mosaic Law. They would not accept the fact that salvation was by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone, apart from any human works or law-keeping. The Judaizers argued that the Mosaic Law, because it was given hundreds of years after the Abrahamic Covenant, actually substituted for, or at least took precedence over, the Abrahamic Covenant. They were convinced that since the time God gave the law to Moses salvation was by law-works. Paul proves in this section of scripture that the law of Moses does not supplant the Abrahamic Covenant. He shows that the promise of grace in the Abrahamic Covenant is still in force for the Christian, and the Mosaic Law as a unit has been set aside as a way of life for Christians in the Church.

GOD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM CANNOT BE BROKEN 3:15-16

“Brothers, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case.”

Paul begins his argument with an illustration from everyday life among the Gentiles. He is referring to the last will and testament of the ancient Greeks and Romans. Once a will was made up, it could only be changed by the one who made out the will. Once the person died, the will could not be revoked, modified or challenged. A promise or will or covenant had been made and there was not any way to change it.

The point for this context is clear. If a man makes covenants and promises and keeps them, how much more will God be faithful to His covenant with Abraham, for God's promises are immutable (unchanging). The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say “and to seeds,” meaning many people, but “and to your seed,” meaning one person, who is Christ. God promised an inheritance to Abraham and his posterity (Gen. 13:15 **“All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever.”** Gen. 17:8 **“The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.”**)

In Genesis, the promise is given to Abraham and his physical descendants. However, we know from other scripture that these promises are not to all Jews indiscriminately simply because they are physically related to Abraham. The promises of the Abrahamic Covenant will be fulfilled to spiritual Jews, those who have been “born of the Spirit” because they have believed the promises.

The Apostle Paul takes these two verses and gives them an even deeper meaning and applies the singular “seed” to Christ Himself. The promises of the Abrahamic Covenant were ultimately made to Christ, for He fulfills the spiritual meaning of the covenant. Therefore, all who receive Christ, whether Jew or Gentile, will be recipients of the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant. Men and women are blessed or justified because they are related to Christ who fulfills the covenant to Abraham. All Gentiles who are Christians are related to Abraham by faith in Christ (Gal. 3:29 **“If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.”**).

Gentile Christians are spiritual seed of Abraham, not physical seed, and they receive the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant. All Gentiles who receive Jesus Christ are spiritual seed of Abraham and partake of the universal aspects of the Abrahamic Covenant: **“And all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”**

While all scholars do not agree with me, I personally believe that all the spiritual seed of Abraham (Jews and Gentiles) will inherit the land promised in the Abrahamic Covenant. When a Gentile receives Christ, he is justified and placed into the Church. This act of faith in Christ gives him a place in the yet future kingdom on earth as well as the eternal kingdom to come. Physical seed of Abraham who believed in Christ in the Old Testament and spiritual seed of Abraham who believe in Christ in the New Testament shall inherit the land which will become a reality in the future earthly kingdom after the return of Christ in His second coming.

Amazingly enough, the New Testament expands the land promise to the whole world (Rom 4:13 **“It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.”**). I do not completely understand all this but I do believe it and some day will enjoy it immensely.

This is a blessed truth. All saved Gentiles are sons and daughters of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the promises of the covenant belong to them. The Church is vitally connected with the Old Testament saints, for all of God's family is blessed in the Messiah who fulfills the Abrahamic Covenant.

GOD'S COVENANT OF GRACE PRECEDED THE MOSAIC LAW 3; 17-18

“What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise.”

In order to refute the Judaizers who said the Mosaic Law took the place of the Abrahamic Covenant as the way of salvation, Paul shows that hundreds of years before the Mosaic Law was given by Moses, God already had given the Abrahamic Covenant which contained the promises of salvation. The Mosaic Law did not change or render void the promise of grace in the Abrahamic Covenant.

God gave the promise to Abraham in 2000 BC. The law was given in 1500 BC. Men and women were being saved by grace through faith long before there was a Mosaic Law. Even those who lived in the Age of Law were saved by grace through faith because there is no salvation outside the covenant of grace.

God gave the Mosaic Law to the children of Israel but He never gave it to them to be the means of obtaining salvation. God had a purpose for the law but it was not to give men salvation. The purpose of the law was to curb sin and to point people to the reality that they were sinners and in need of a Savior. The law had a temporary function as a rule of life for the nation of Israel and ceased to be a rule of life as a unit at the Cross. The law had a temporary function whereas the promise of grace in the Abrahamic Covenant was permanent and eternal.

“For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.”

Paul makes it clear that if salvation is in any way of law-works then it nullifies the promise made to Abraham. Law, when added to promise, destroys salvation by grace through faith in Christ. Salvation must rest either on promise or on law, for it is impossible to mix the two.

The text says, **“God in his grace gave it,”** referring to the promise of salvation or justification as found in the Abrahamic Covenant. The promise of salvation was given as a pure gift to Abraham and his seed. The promise came from God’s heart with no strings attached, for it was given in grace. God’s promise to Abraham and his spiritual seed was unconditional, and He gave the promise because He wanted to, out of His own free action.

All who lay hold of the promise of grace by faith will be saved and those who do not shall not be saved. God did not go back on His promise of grace when He gave the Mosaic Law. God’s covenant is sure. Every sinner who trusts in Christ crucified for salvation, apart from any merit, work or human good, receives the blessing of eternal life and inherits the promises of God made to Abraham.

The dealings with Abraham and Moses were based on two different principles. The Mosaic Law is based on works and the Abrahamic Covenant is based on grace. Law and grace are as far apart as heaven and hell.

In God’s promise to Abraham, we hear over and over again, “I will do this; I will do that; I will; I will,” indicating pure grace with no strings attached. But in the law of Moses God said, “You shall do this; you shall not do that.”

God’s promises of salvation were free and unconditional to Abraham. There were no works to do, no law to obey, no merit to establish and no conditions to fulfill. God simply said, **“I will give you a seed. To your seed I will give the land, and in your seed all the nations of the earth will be blessed.”** The Mosaic Law said, “Do and live,” which was an impossible task to perform because the law is constantly broken by men. But in the covenant of grace found in the promise to Abraham, God said, “In grace I have done something for you in Christ, believe and live.” One is of works and the other is of grace.

The promise of grace in the Abrahamic Covenant sets forth the true religion of God—God’s plan, God’s grace, God’s initiative in salvation with man appropriating salvation through faith. The Mosaic Law sets forth a false view of religion—man’s will, man’s duty, man’s initiative in salvation by working to get

right before God. Law-works and grace-promise are two distinct religions and never will the two meet. Promise leads to eternal life and law leads to eternal death.

Christian, you are part of the greatest heritage known to man. You are God's family and related by faith to all the Old Testament and New Testament saints. You are related by faith to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, having four thousand years of history behind you. You even go back beyond Abraham to Adam, Eve and Noah for thousands of years more of history. You belong to the family of faith. Don't let anyone tell you that Christianity began 2000 years ago when Jesus Christ appeared on the scene of history. Our Christian faith has its roots in the Old Testament and in some form can be traced all the way back to Adam and Eve.

God has been faithful to His people from the beginning of creation until now, and He will be faithful to you also. Let us, therefore, push on in our faith, knowing that God will be faithful to us because we are part of the family of faith. (Heb. 12:1-2a **"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith."**).

CONCLUSION

For you today without Christ, if you are going to have your sins forgiven and be granted eternal life, you are going to have to be saved by grace through faith in Christ Jesus. You cannot get right with God by works, acts, law or merit. You must trust Jesus Christ alone, God's historical and theological answer to the sin problem.

If you are going to be a spiritual seed of Abraham and be on your way to earthly and eternal blessing, then you must receive Christ, just as every other person in history has done. Adam, Abel, Noah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses and every Jew and every Gentile are spiritual seed of Abraham if they have trusted in Christ. God will grant the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant to all who are related to Christ by faith.

Without Christ you have no hope. With Christ, you have the promise of God that will grant you hope for time and eternity. Believe the promises of God in Christ and be saved, for salvation is found only in Christ.