

Faith alone since the beginning (Galatians 3:6–9)

The battle for the gospel, for the good news that salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone, continues to today. In the early church some Jews who are professed accepting Jesus as the Christ, nevertheless failed to see His work on the cross as sufficient and wanted to add to faith in Christ also adherence to the Mosaic law. Among other things, they saw a connection to Abraham as important (cf. Matthew 3:9a; John 8:33, 37). In their thinking Gentiles could only belong to Abraham's family and receive his blessing through circumcision. Paul therefore explains to the Galatian believers that from the very beginning even with Abraham righteousness before God was by faith alone. To do this Paul points to four truths about Abraham.

1. ***Abraham's righteousness (3:6): he believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness.***
 - a. Paul cites Genesis 15:6 which by its time in history rules out "works" as the basis for justification. See Genesis 11:30; 12:1–3, 7; 13:14–17; 15:1–6; 17:1–21; 18:17–19; 21; 22. Since they came later in life, neither circumcision nor Abraham's obedience in offering Isaac counted as righteousness, but Abraham's faith.
 - b. Because Abraham believed God, that faith was entered into God's "ledger" for Abraham as righteousness, that is, a right standing before the law in which there was no longer any condemnation.

Paul was not preaching some new doctrine. Justification by faith alone stretches all the way back to the beginning, to Genesis. Abraham was the prime example for the Jews who held Abraham to be their father. Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness.
2. ***Abraham's sons (3:7): those of faith are true sons of Abraham.***
 - a. The literal term "sons" (rather than "children") is not to be understood as gender exclusive, but culturally implying both the heir and the character of someone (just as James and John were called "sons of thunder").
 - b. To be truly "children" or "sons of Abraham" is to be like Abraham and act as he did having his faith, believing God (cf. John 8:39–40).
 - c. Paul emphasizes being "of faith" and challenged his readers to know this very clearly. To be in the line of Abraham and inherit the blessings of Abraham, you must like Abraham believe God.
3. ***Abraham's gospel (3:8): God justifies the Gentiles by faith.***
 - a. Scripture, though not yet written in Abraham's day, is said to have preached "good news" ("gospel" does not mean here the death and resurrection of Christ) because Paul and other writers of Scripture understood Scripture to be God speaking. Cf. Romans 9:17. They were thoroughly convinced of the inspiration and authority of Scripture.
 - b. God promised Abraham (Genesis 12:3; 18:18) that in him all the nations (i.e., Gentiles) would be blessed. That blessing would come through Abraham's offspring or "seed" (Genesis 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; cf. Galatians 3:16), but would come to Gentiles "in Abraham" by them acting as Abraham and believing God. Paul declares this to be the "good news" that the Gentiles are justified by faith. Jew and Gentile alike can only be justified by faith, and the Gentile needs not to become a Jew.
4. ***Abraham's heirs (3:9): those of faith are blessed along with believing Abraham.***
 - a. Paul's logic follows verse by verse to this grand conclusion.
 - b. "Those of faith" refer to those who believe God, not merely that He exists, but that He is true and faithful to do what He says. Abraham believed God's promise. The Galatians and all people today are called to believe the truths about Jesus Christ (cf. 1:1, 4, 6, 2:4, 16, 19–20). "Those of faith" have their faith counted to them as righteousness, just as Abraham.

From the very beginning the way to a righteous standing before God is faith, believing God. The line of blessing does indeed come from Abraham, but one does not enter it by physical birth or human efforts. Rather those who are of faith are blessed along with believing Abraham.

Questions for further thought and discussion:

- How did Abraham's life measure up to God's righteous standard? How does this make the manner of his being counted righteous important?
- What does it mean to you personally as a believer that you are a son of Abraham?
- How should Genesis 12:3 and 18:18 have shaped the attitude of Jews toward Gentiles? How should these verses and Galatians 3:8 shape our missionary efforts?