

The Spiritual Advantages of Faith
Galatians 3:6-14

At different times in our lives, we all have spiritual insecurities. Maybe you've had this experience. . . . You talk with someone who's very confident spiritually. That person describes a life-changing seminar or book about parenting, finances, marriage, or seeking God. Instead of learning what you can and being happy for them, you think, "I've never experienced anything like that. Maybe my whole Christian life to date has been a waste. I wonder if I've missed the whole point of the Christian life." If you're spiritually insecure you can begin to think that there's some "key" to the Christian life that you're missing.

Today we look at a passage in Galatians in which Paul addresses this very issue. The Gentile believers in the Galatian church were made to feel like if only they would keep the Jewish law their spiritual lives would be complete. You can imagine how these Gentile believers might start second-guessing themselves and wondering if perhaps they'd missed something. Maybe faith in Jesus wasn't really enough. Maybe their faith wasn't really complete.

To that mindset Paul says ***you have already been given every spiritual advantage through faith in Jesus Christ.*** In an amazing set of statements Paul lets the Galatians know that through faith in Christ they had already received everything they need to thrive spiritually. Thinking that keeping the Law would complete their faith was an insult to God the Father who had already declared them righteous, God the Son who had redeemed them from the curse, and God the Spirit who indwelt them. They didn't need to add anything; they needed to understand what they'd already received.

The same thing is true today for those who have trusted in Jesus. It's an insult to the triune God to think that what we've received through faith in Christ Jesus isn't quite enough. That's what we'll see in Galatians 3:6-14.

A Word of Qualification: Seminars, books, speakers, and experiences have their place in the Christian life. I'm not a Bible-only person; I don't recommend that the only book you ever read is the Bible. I actually think we ***need*** the perspective of others in the body of Christ; this perspective can come through books and sermons and seminars. Something is wrong in my soul when I find myself cynical about everyone and everything – as if I'm the only one in the world who's really has the Bible figured out. We need to be open to how God might work through others in the body of Christ. But my point this morning is that we need to resist the tendency to think that what we've received through faith in Jesus isn't enough.

Through faith in Jesus Christ we have received the "blessing" promised to Abraham. (3:6-9) Beginning in verse 6 Paul has the Galatians think back to Abraham – who lived hundreds of years before the Law was even given to Moses. Paul goes back to Abraham because nobody was more respected among Jews than him. If Paul can establish that he is being faithful to Abraham and Abraham's experience when he says that God wants us to live by faith (not Law), then his argument carries great weight. Paul quotes from Genesis 15:6 in verse 6:

6 Even so Abraham BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.

The context of Genesis 15 is God's promise to Abraham that he'd have a son. The promise had come over twenty years earlier, Abraham and Sarah were very old, and they hadn't been able to conceive. Abraham began to wonder if God's promise would be fulfilled through someone already in his household, not through a child that born naturally to him and Sarah. God's response was very clear (Genesis 15):

5 And He took him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." 6 Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.

When God saw Abraham's faith (which was faith in the specific promise of natural-born offspring), He "reckoned it to him as righteous." Because of his faith, Abraham had a right-standing before God. Notice Paul's conclusion for his own day (Galatians 3:7):

7 Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham.

"Sons of Abraham" was a term the Jews would have used for ethnic Israel, Jews who were physically descended from Abraham and who kept the Law. Paul says, "No, the thing that is distinctively Abrahamic is faith." Furthermore, Paul continues, *the Scriptures themselves* indicate that Gentiles (without physical descent from Abraham) would be righteous before God.

8 The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU."

Paul here establishes that God *always intended* to include the Gentiles in the blessing promised to Abraham. Paul wasn't veering off course by insisting that Gentiles could have a right relationship with God. He was actually being faithful to the original promise made to Abraham in Genesis 12 (a promise that came hundreds of years before the Law was given).

You may remember that Abraham and his family were living in the city of Ur of the Chaldeans. When Abraham was 75 years old God told him to take his family and relocate 1,500 miles to the southwest to a land known as Canaan. We read this in Genesis 12:

1 Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country,
And from your relatives
And from your father's house,
To the land which I will show you;
2 And I will make you a great nation,
And I will bless you,
And make your name great;
And so you shall be a blessing;
3 And I will bless those who bless you,

And the one who curses you I will curse.
And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

God promised to bless Abraham so that through Abraham "all the families of the earth shall be blessed." God restated His commitment to bless the nations/families of the earth in passages such as Isaiah 49:6.

6 He says, "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant
To raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel;
I will also make You a light of the nations
So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

Paul was merely being faithful to the heart of God by insisting that "the Scripture" foresaw that "God would justify the Gentiles by faith" – not by the works of the Law. Notice Paul's conclusion in verse 9:

9 So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.

Since God promised to bless the Gentiles through Abraham, and since Abraham was the consummate "believer" (having been justified by faith), then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham.

Paul wanted the Galatians to know that ***because they were sons of Abraham through faith they already had every spiritual advantage***. If you're a believer, ***you*** have been blessed with Abraham the believer. We don't often stop to think about this, but as believers in Jesus, we are the recipients of the blessings promised to Abraham 4,500 years ago! The life we've been given is the fulfillment of the promise made ***to Abraham!*** Instead of thinking, "What has God done for me lately," we should appreciate the blessing of living when we do in the flow of salvation history (after the cross and resurrection).

Through faith in Jesus Christ we have been redeemed from the curse of the Law. (3:10-13) In this paragraph Paul continues to quote from the Old Testament. His point here is that the Law itself recognized that it could never be the basis for acceptance before God. In verse 10 Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 27:26 to establish that the Law pronounced a curse on those who don't obey everything written in the Law.

10 For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written,
"CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN
IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM."

Whereas being "of faith" brings blessing, being "of the works of the Law" brings a curse. Since nobody can fully abide by everything written in the Law, everybody who tries falls under the curse pronounced in Deuteronomy 27. That's why the Law itself advocated a life of faith. In verse 11 Paul quotes from Habakkuk 2:4 – which was written while the Law was still in effect.

11 Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, "THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."

As Brian explained last week, a person *enters* into a relationship with God through faith and a person *continues to live* by faith. It's wrong to think that you are initially accepted by God because of your faith and then you have to maintain your standing before God through the works of the Law. No, the person who is declared righteous by faith also *lives* by faith. In verse 12 Paul quotes from Leviticus 18:5 to re-emphasize that those who lived under the Law had to "do" everything required by the Law.

12 However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, "HE WHO PRACTICES THEM SHALL LIVE BY THEM."

Although they were to live by faith under the old covenant, the Law was essentially a system of doing what was commanded. In verse 10 Paul pointed out that a person's inability to keep every command in the Law put him/her under a curse. This dark realization makes the sacrifice of Christ shine all the more brightly:

13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us-- for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE "--

In Paul's day, if you redeemed something you "purchased" it or even "bought it back. In the imagery of this passage, those who were "of the Law" were under a curse that they couldn't escape. Being sinful to begin with, they were helpless to become un-sinful. The Law provided a way to address this sinfulness: animals were sacrificed each year to pay for that year's sins. But the blood of bulls and goats and sheep could never permanently remove sin and the curse of the Law. Jesus came as the spotless, sinless Lamb of God – the final sacrifice that could permanently remove the sin of the people. His death was this payment – this redemption – for sin, releasing us from the curse of the Law.

Paul quotes Deuteronomy 21:23 when he writes, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree." That passage says that when a person is executed by hanging from a tree, that person is cursed. Since being crucified on a cross is basically the same thing as being executed by hanging, Christ too was under a curse. Since He was sinless, He bore our curse in His body on the cross.

Paul wanted the Galatians to know that *because Jesus had redeemed them from the curse of the Law through faith they already had every spiritual advantage*. When you and I start feeling spiritually insecure, we need to remember the same thing. Jesus took the curse that we deserved because of our sinfulness. How dare we think that His redemption wasn't enough! We need to go back to this foundational truth that Jesus paid the highest price that could possibly be paid in order to redeem us.

Through faith in Jesus Christ we have received the promised Holy Spirit. (3:14) In verse 14 Paul returns to the blessing of Abraham promised to the Gentiles. He explains what those who've been redeemed (those who now belong to God) have received:

14 in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

The blessing of Abraham is ultimately the promised Holy Spirit. Those who believe in Jesus (not those who keep the Law) receive the promised Holy Spirit through faith. It's hard for us to appreciate how staggering this statement would have been to Jews in the first century. In the Old Covenant believers experienced the Holy Spirit, but the promise that the Holy Spirit would indwell every single believer was something in the distant future. That would happen in the fullness of time, in the age of fulfillment, when the Messiah came and established the Kingdom of God. In other words, our common experience of receiving the Holy Spirit by faith in Jesus is something that people like Abraham, David, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah could only dream about.

Paul wanted the Galatians to know that ***because they had the promised Holy Spirit through faith they already had every spiritual advantage***. Francis Chan wrote a book about the Holy Spirit entitled *Forgotten God, Reversing Our Tragic Neglect of the Holy Spirit*. He wrote a couple of paragraphs that express well the mindset that is consistent with the blessings described in this passage:

It really is an astounding truth that the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you. He lives in me. I do not know what the Spirit will do or where He'll lead me each time I invite Him to guide me. But I'm tired of living in such a way that looks exactly like people who do not have the Holy Spirit of God living in them. I want to consistently live with an awareness of His strength. I want to be different today from what I was yesterday as the fruit of the Spirit becomes more manifest in me.

I want to live so that I am truly submitted to the Spirit's leading on a daily basis. Christ said it is better for us that the Spirit came, and I want to live like I know that is true. I don't want to keep crawling when I have the ability to fly. (p. 37)

I totally agree. We should expect that the promised Holy Spirit will make a difference.

How do these truths affect our spiritual expectations in this life?

Think of the most difficult circumstance you're going through right now. It may be a strained relationship, a destructive sin problem, uncertainty about the future, or simply circumstances beyond your control. Almost everybody I know is facing some type of difficult circumstance. How do the truths we've been discussing this morning inform how you deal with your difficult circumstances?

Basically, the fact that we've been given every spiritual advantage through faith in Jesus should give us renewed courage to walk by faith in ***these*** circumstances. There really is no need to panic. Being declared righteous, being redeemed from the curse, and being indwelled by the promised Holy Spirit – all by faith – should remind us that God will give us everything we need. God doesn't guarantee the outcomes we want; we live in a fallen, broken world. Some things won't be fixed this side of heaven. But know that through faith in Christ you've received everything you need to thrive in the midst of the difficult circumstances you face.