

Who Are The Children Of Abraham

Galatians 3:6-9

This Week's Prayer
Requests:

Memory Verse: Galatians 3:26 - "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

Text: "... – just as Abraham 'believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, 'In you all the nations shall be blessed.' So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.

Monday

Have you ever
received an
inheritance? What
impact, if any, did it
have on you?

You all know the value of a good inheritance. Indeed receiving an inheritance can be a wonderful, surprising, life-changing event. I wonder how many of us have ever thought how neat it would be if we received an inheritance from some forgotten or unknown relative that left us without any worries. They write movies like that don't they. The royal family dies suddenly, and the only one left to inherit the title, position and wealth is Bob. Sometimes we might even daydream about how things would have been had we been born into a different family, and we might even envy people that seem to have been born with silver spoons in their mouths.

I remember one day in the Air Force, I was doing legal assistance and a Staff Sergeant came into the office to get a will drawn up. He was a bachelor, getting ready to retire after 20 years. This man joined the service right after high school, progressed normally through the automatic promotions given to everyone who can breath; - that's the only qualification for making staff sergeant, the ability to breath - and then, he hadn't been promoted in over 15 years. For whatever reason, maybe he hadn't even taken the required exams, he just decided to bump along doing the absolute minimum necessary to stay in the service. And after not being promoted, he didn't separate from the service and try to do better in another career, but was simply content to stay where he was at. His pay as a Staff Sergeant was about \$1800 a month at that time and after retirement he would receive half of that per month.

He came into my office and I started asking him questions about his plans, what he was going to do after the service. Then I started down my checklist and got to the question about assets. I asked him about his

What's more important, a physical inheritance or a spiritual one? Why?

assets to see if he would have any tax liability that needed to be avoided in planning how to handle his estate. I didn't expect any, since an individual in his situation at that time would have to die with over \$750,000 dollars in assets for estate tax to kick in. But you have to ask all the questions. It was then that he told me, "Oh I have 8 million dollars in U.S. savings accounts and about twice that in other accounts abroad" and he proceeded to pull out his information on various bank accounts.

This gave me some pause, and I asked him, "How did you get this money?" It turned out that his father was a millionaire. He was the only son, and his parents had died a few years ago leaving everything to him. He hadn't touched it, but just stowed it away into various accounts and investments, letting it build up in absolutely incredible amounts of interest every year. Suddenly it became very clear why he had never bothered to try and further his career. This staff sergeant was a man, as far as the world is concerned, who was very fortunate in his heritage and parents.

Now Beloved, far more important than your physical parents and your physical inheritance, is your spiritual parentage and your spiritual inheritance. In fact, it is so much more important that if put to the test, one must be ready to forsake all worldly parents and inheritance for the sake of the spiritual, for it is worth more than all the millions that this world can offer.

The text we come to this week as we study our way through this marvelous book of Galatians is about the spiritual parentage and the inheritance of those who have trusted Christ. For in this text, Paul explains to the churches of Galatian how one becomes a child of Abraham and inherits his blessing. So we must ask ourselves, not only "Who are the children of Abraham?" but even more importantly, "Am I a true child of Abraham and a recipient of his blessing?" Our text will give us three facts this week to help us answer this question and identify the true children of Abraham.

Tuesday

Yesterday, we asked the question, "Who are the children of Abraham?" But before we get to that, "Who in the world is Abraham and why is Paul talking about him?"

You will remember that the Judaizers had come to the Galatian churches

Who was Abraham and why is he important to our faith?

and taught them that salvation, being rescued from your sin and being made right with God, is by faith plus works, human effort. Now a number of the Judaizers and teaching this false Gospel were no doubt using Moses as the classic example of what people ought to be doing, how they ought to be living their Christian lives. So Paul goes behind Moses as it were, goes further back and says, "If you want to talk about the father of our faith let's talk about Abraham."

What did God promise to Abram in Genesis 12:1-3.

Now in order to get this clear in our minds we need to turn just for a moment back to Genesis for a moment. Abram was a man introduced to us in Genesis chapter 12, whom God called out of his homeland and made a wonderful promise to in verses 1-3.

We follow Abram's life through Genesis chapter 15, where God speaks to him in verses 1-5 and says this, "After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I *am* your shield, your exceedingly great reward.' ² But Abram said, 'Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house *is* Eliezer of Damascus?' ³ Then Abram said, 'Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!' ⁴ And behold, the word of the LORD *came* to him, saying, 'This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.' ⁵ Then He brought him outside and said, 'Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.' And He said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.'

This promise is consistent with the one God had given earlier in chapter 12. But now let's try our best to get this picture. Here is Abram and he's an old man. He was seventy-five when he was first called. So this is not a young guy. This is not a young man with all of his future in front of him. This is a man, whom he and his wife, have been unsuccessful in having children for decades and now Sarah's womb is "dead" as it were, no longer fertile. God comes to him and first of all He says, "You're going to have an heir." That must seem phenomenally improbable.

Then God takes him outside on a starlit evening, no modern cities around, no light pollution to get in the way and He says, "Look up at that sky." Abram looks up at that manifold beauty." God says, "Count them." Abram says, "That's impossible." Then God says, "Abram, as the stars up in the heavens, so shall your descendants be." Then verse 6 of Genesis 15 says of Abraham, "And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness."

What does it mean that Abraham was “credited with righteousness.”

Abraham believed the promise and the Lord put him in a right standing with Himself.

Question: “Was Abraham put in a right standing before God, because he was circumcised?” Answer: “No, he wasn’t circumcised until fourteen years after this event.” Question: “Was Abraham put in a right standing before God, because he obeyed the law?” Answer: “Not at all, because the law wasn’t given until 430 years after this event.”

How did Abraham receive this gift?

So for these foolish Galatians, who are beginning to think that right standing before God is on the basis of doing this and doing that part of the law, Paul says, “Think this out for a moment. Abraham is the daddy of us all. Abraham is the father of faith and there is a direct link between the faith of Abraham and our own. How was Abraham justified before God?”

Moreover, How do we become his children and receive his inheritance?

Now I can think of at least two reasons why most modern people would simply shrug their shoulders at this idea. One reason is that they have no concept of what it means to be a son of Abraham and no sense of the stupendous value of the blessing promised to Abraham's children. And the other reason is that they can't see how a 20th century American who doesn't have a Jewish cell in his body can be called a son or daughter of Abraham. In other words, if this promise in Gal. 3:6-9 is going to strengthen our faith and increase our joy we have to dig in and see what it means and how it is grounded in the Old Testament. And that's our aim this week: the advancement of our joy and faith. Because the truth is that genuine faith works itself out not for the sake of salvation, which you cannot earn, but for the sake of love (Gal. 5:6) and when others see the sacrificial love of God's people many are gripped and give glory to Him (Mt. 5:16). So for the sake of our faith, our love, and ultimately for God's glory, let's begin tomorrow to look at the critical facts God has for us in verses 7-9 concerning this issue.

Wednesday

The first fact we want to point out from our text this week is this:

1. The children of Abraham are not children by physical descent (v. 7).

The Word of God from this text for us today is that anyone - Jew or

When Paul says, “Those who are of faith are sons of Abraham” who does he exclude from being his children?

What is the “faith” that Paul is referring to here?

Gentile, rich or poor, male or female, white or black or brown, quick-witted or slow, old or young--anyone can be a child of Abraham and inherit the blessings promised to Abraham's children if you live by faith.

The structure of the text is simple. The main point is stated in two different ways, once in verse 7 and once in verse 9. And each of these is preceded by its Old Testament support. Verse six quotes Genesis 15:6, “Abraham ‘believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’” Verse 7 draws out of that verse together with verse 5 a general inference: “So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.” The thing that makes a person a “son of Abraham” is faith. Then verse 8 quotes Genesis 12:3 (and 18:18), “In you all the nations shall be blessed.” And verse 9 draws out the inference, “So then, those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.” The thing that qualifies a person to inherit Abraham's blessing is faith. So the main point -- the Word of God for us today (expressed in verses 7 and 9) -- is that any one of us who lives by faith is a child of Abraham and will inherit Abraham's blessing.

Paul teaches that sonship does not depend on physical descent. For example, in Galatians 3:28-29 he says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.” So the first thing to be said is that Jews and non-Jews can be offspring or children of Abraham.

Romans 9:6,7 confirms this: “Not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham just because they are descendants.” But we don't even have to go beyond our text to see this. Verses 7 and 9 refer to the same group of people? Verse 7 says that “those of faith are sons of Abraham.” Verse 9 says that “those of faith are blessed with Abraham.” Surely, these are the same people: sons of Abraham who will therefore enjoy the blessings promised to Abraham and his children. It is clear from the connection between verses 8 and 9 that these people include Gentiles. Verse 8 quotes Genesis 12:3, “In you shall all the nations be blessed” -- not just Jews. And from that Paul infers verse 9: “So then, those of faith are blessed.” So the believers of verse 9 must include Gentiles, and since these are the same as the believers in verse 7 who are called Sons of Abraham, the sons of Abraham must include Gentiles. That's the first thing about being a son of Abraham: it does not depend on physical descent from Abraham.

I know this may sound strange to us, but it is very close to the heart of the gospel. White Anglo-Saxons can become sons of Abraham, Hispanics and Laotians and Cambodians can become sons of Abraham; black African Muslims can become sons of Abraham; anti-Semitic, redneck Nazi vigilantes can repent and become sons of Abraham; Hitler could have been saved by faith and could have become a son of Abraham.

Was the blessing given to Abraham for his physical descendants only or for the world?

In Genesis 12:1-3, you will remember that Abraham was 75 years old when God called him to leave his home and his country and go to a land he would show him. Here is the foundational promise of the Jewish people. “Now the Lord had said to Abram: ‘Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’”

How do we know God’s intention in Genesis?

When God chose Abram to found a new nation he made sure that Abram knew that the Jewish people were being created *for the world*. Their mission is to “*be a blessing*.” Their destiny was to serve all the nations. Genesis 18:18 says the same thing, and uses “nations” (Gentiles), instead of “families.” This is the text Paul quotes in Galatians 3:8, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.”

But is this blessing which the nations get the same as sonship? Is there any clue in Genesis that the nations would be blessed in Abraham because they would somehow *become* his sons? Yes, there is in Genesis 17. Here God spells out the terms of his covenant with Abraham and says in verses 4 and 5, “As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations” (literally a multitude of nations). The very change of Abram’s name to Abraham shows God’s intention very clearly!

God has in view here the same nations that will be blessed in Gen. 12:3 and 18:18, namely, “all the families (nations) of the earth.” And Genesis 17:4 explains specifically how the nations of Gen. 12:3 and 18:18 are going to be blessed. They are going to be blessed because Abraham will become their father. They are going to be blessed by actually becoming sons of Abraham.

Thursday

What is the significance of the father/son and father/daughter relationship?

We saw yesterday that the children of Abraham are not children by physical descent; and in fact, God's stated purpose for Abraham in the Book of Genesis was for him to become the father of the Gentile nations as well as the Jewish nation. But how exactly does this happen. This brings us to the second fact from this weeks text. Namely:

2. The Children of Abraham are those who believe like Abraham (vv. 6-7).

In John chapter 8 we have a very interesting incident recorded for us. Jesus proclaims that He is the "Light of the world" and that if the people would abide in His word they would be His disciples, know the truth and the truth will set them free." Some who didn't believe respond by saying that they were Abraham's children and had never been in bondage to anyone. Jesus responds by saying that they are in bondage to sin which is proven by the fact that they are seeking to kill Him.

How are you like your father today?

Then in verse 39 the Jews defend themselves against Jesus' rebuke by saying, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children you would do what Abraham did." The Lord shows us two things in His response. First, he shows us that they are *not* Abraham's children even though they are Jews and his physical descendants (John 8:37) - and so he confirms what we studied yesterday, that being a child of Abraham is not the same as Jewishness. The second thing the Lord shows us is that being a child of Abraham means being like Abraham, that is doing what Abraham did: "If you were Abraham's children you would do what Abraham did."

What was it that Abraham did?

According to Galatians 3:6 what Abraham did was believe God. He believed the Gospel that was preached to him beforehand according to verse 8. "Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (Gen. 15:6). Paul says in verse 7, "So you see, it is those of faith who are sons of Abraham." Abraham was a man of faith, so if you do what he did, if you have faith in God's promise, you will be his

child.

What must you do to be saved?

A Sunday School teacher was teaching a class of four and five year olds one Sunday, and she began asking them a series of questions. She said, "If I'm nice to my friends, I share my toys and don't say mean things to them, if I do that can I go to heaven?" The class looked at her seriously and said, "No." She said, "Well what if when I go to school, I work really hard and obey my teachers, then do I get to go to heaven?" "No," the class said. She said, "Well what if when I'm at home I'm super nice to my brothers and sisters and I obey my parents and do everything they say, can I go to heaven then?" "No," said the class. The teacher thought a little bit and said, "How about this? Let's say I come to church every Sunday; I pay close attention in class and in church; I never miss a Sunday; I give to the church and I volunteer, doing things like cleaning up in the rooms; now do I get to go to heaven?" "No," said the class. She put her hands on her hips and said, "Well what do I have to do to go to heaven?" Then One little boy at the back of group raised his hand excitedly and said, "I know, I know." The teacher called on him, and the little boy raised himself up and said excitedly, "You have to die!"

The question that the Apostle Paul is answering in this passage is the same question asked by the Sunday School teacher, "What do you have to do to go to heaven." Do I have to strive to be a good person, live a good life humanly speaking, try to do my best to follow the law and commandments of God and engage in certain religious rituals? This was the answer to the question given by the Judaizers that Paul was writing against. Or how about this alternative, is it sufficient for me to simply die with the belief that all people will eventually find their way to heaven through one path or another? Maybe the only qualification is being human? What do I have to do to go to heaven?

Paul's answer to that question was, "You don't have to **do** anything. Indeed you **cannot do** anything to earn or work your way to heaven. Neither is it that everyone is automatically saved. Rather you must believe in the Gospel of Jesus Christ just as Abraham believed the promises of God including the Gospel of the promised "seed" singular that was preached to him (Gal. 3:16; Gen. 12:7; 22:18). This is the way to be justified, that is be in a right relation with God, it is by faith in the Promised One and not by works. This is the only way to be a true child of Abraham.

Friday

What were some of the blessings promised to Abraham and His descendants?

So far this week we have seen two critical facts about the descendants of Abraham: The Children of Abraham are not children by physical descent (v. 7). And The Children of Abraham are those who believe like Abraham believed (vv. 6 -7). There is a third and final one that we want to cover today:

Consider Gen. 12:3?

3. The Children of Abraham are those who inherit his blessing (vv. 8-9).

Gen. 14:19-20?

They are heirs of the blessing to Abraham and his descendants. Gal. 3:29 makes this especially clear: "If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, *heirs* according to the promise."

Gen. 15:1?

So the question that begs to be answered now is: What are those blessings? Is there anything in this inheritance that should interest a twentieth-century American businessman, housewife, student, professional, laborer, teenager, senior citizen? I think there is. I will mention one that is found in the immediate passage this week.

Gen. 15:7?

If you are a child of Abraham part of your guaranteed inheritance is the bequest of justification, being declared righteous, not guilty, before God. Only justification can take away your fear of meeting God loaded with your sin. Notice Gal. 3:8, "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'" (Emphasis added).

Gen. 17:7-8?

This verse teaches that the reason the Scripture promises blessing to the nations through Abraham is that God intended to justify people from every nation. Since knew that He would justify the Gentiles beforehand, He promised in Scripture blessing to the Gentiles through Abraham." So the promised blessing of Abraham includes justification. This justification is not only declared in Gen 15:6, but it is implicit elsewhere. For instance in Gen. 15:1 God says, "I am ... your exceedingly great reward." God cannot be anyone's reward unless that person is forgiven and made to stand in His wonderful presence forever.

And you recall from the connection between Genesis 12:3 and 17:4 that the reason the nations will be blessed is because Abraham becomes their father. They become his sons. Therefore, justification is part of our

inheritance as children of Abraham. If you are his child, then, and only then, are you justified and have God as your “exceedingly great reward” as well.

Of what value is justification before God?

This justification means that in spite of all your sins God reckons you to be righteous. If you are a child of Abraham, all the things you have ever done wrong or ever will do wrong are forgiven and paid for by Christ. God does not hold your sins against you. I don't know of any cultural, intellectual or technological changes over the past two thousand years that makes this inheritance any less needed or less desirable today than it was for the Galatians. This and this alone can take away the fear of meeting an infinitely holy God loaded with our sin. So the first thing we inherit from God as children of Abraham is justification, acquittal of all our sin. And this, Beloved, actually becomes the basis for all the other blessings!

In summary, we have seen three important facts about what it means to be children of Abraham. First, it is not the same as physical descent from Abraham. Even twentieth century Gentiles can be Abraham's sons. Second, it means being like Abraham, a chip off the old block, as it were, especially in his life of faith. Third, if you are a child of Abraham you inherit the blessing of Abraham. You become the beneficiary of the promises God made to Abraham and his children. That means you are justified, acquitted by God of all your sins on the basis of Christ's death in your place.

Therefore, it is surely no overstatement to say that the most important concern of your life is to make sure that you are a child of Abraham.

What does Paul mean when he says, “those of faith...”? Compare this to Gal. 2:20 in giving your answer.

So I close with an observation from our text and an illustration. The text makes plain that the only way to be a child of Abraham is to live by faith. Literally, Gal. 3:7 says, “Know therefore that those of faith, these are the sons of Abraham.” The test of whether you are **of faith**, is not whether you once made a decision somewhere in the past and left it off afterwards, but whether your life is a life of faith, whether faith colors the way you live day by day, moment by moment. The child of Abraham can say without insincerity, “I am crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me, and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.” We are children of Abraham if we **live by faith**.

Consider this illustration from Pastor John Piper: “Picture heaven as Orchestra Hall and the music of the symphony as the glory of God.

Are your affections captured by the things of God or by the things of the world? Be honest in your answer. Eternity is at stake.

Everybody here knows that faith is the precondition for entering that hall and enjoying that music. But some, I fear, have gotten the notion that trusting in Christ is like buying a ticket to Orchestra Hall once for all, and that you can put this ticket away in your pocket as the guarantee of your admission someday, even though the affections of your life are captured by the music of this world. That is not a Biblical view of saving faith. It's a delusion. Faith is a precondition for enjoying the symphony of God's glory not in the sense of getting a ticket but in the sense of getting an ear for heaven's music. The real precondition of enjoying the music of heaven throughout eternity is a new heart which delights in the things of God, not a decision card which you carry in your pocket to ease your conscience while your mind is captivated by the delights of this world."