

Ye Are Abraham's Seed
Galatians 3:8-29
August 15, 2012

The book of Galatians is Paul's defense of the doctrine of justification by faith. It is Paul telling us how it is that we can be saved. It is Paul's statement and defense of the pure and simple gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now Paul didn't learn the gospel at the feet of Gamaliel. Gamaliel was his teacher in the Jewish Law. Neither did he learn it at rabbinical school. The seminaries in Jerusalem were steeped in the Mosaic Law, but they were woefully ignorant of the gospel that was woven throughout the letter of the Law. And Paul didn't even learn the gospel from Peter or the other disciples.

Paul learned the gospel from the great Schoolmaster - Jesus Christ himself. After Paul was saved, Jesus took Paul out into the desert of Arabia and taught him the gospel. Now it seems that this instruction from Christ may have been given over a period of about three years, because Paul never went to Jerusalem during the first three years of his Christian life. It seems that during this time he was with the resurrected Christ in the Arabian School of Theology, receiving his theological training in the gospel.

And so, Paul's gospel training seems to exceed even that of Peter and the other twelve disciples. After his training, Paul was a master theologian. He was a doctor of theology. And his mission in life was to teach the world the gospel of Jesus Christ. When Paul wrote to the Romans, listen to how he described himself:

*Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle,
separated unto the gospel of God.*

Romans 1:1

This described Paul - a servant of Jesus Christ. It is as though Jesus put chains on Paul and Jesus was his master and Paul was his slave. And Paul was in bonds for Jesus Christ, but

he was in bonds willingly.

But you will notice that he was called to be an apostle. This was his calling in life. It was an effective call which Jesus gave to Paul. Jesus didn't meet Paul on the road to Damascus and ask him if he would like to be his servant. Rather, Jesus arrested Paul on the road that day and took him into custody. Jesus gave Paul an irresistible call that day. And all Paul could say was, "Lord, what would you have me to do?"

And Jesus eventually told Paul that he was being separated to the gospel. Paul had before separated himself to the Jewish Law, but now Jesus separated him to the gospel. And as Jesus would teach Paul, the two were not the same.

Paul became the greatest voice for the gospel that has ever been known. God opened up a door for Paul to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. And Paul dedicated himself to the preaching of the gospel. Listen to what Paul said in I Corinthians.

For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

I Corinthians 2:2

Now when we come to the book of Galatians, Paul is angry because Jewish teachers are defiling his gospel by adding to it the Jewish Law. They are telling Paul's converts that salvation is not only by faith in Christ but also by keeping the requirements of the Mosaic Law. Specifically, they are telling his converts that they must be circumcised to be saved.

When Paul heard this, he took Barnabas and Titus and he walked right into the Jerusalem Church to have a meeting with Peter and the other prominent disciples. And at that meeting, after much disputing, the leaders of the Jerusalem Church were compelled to admit that the gospel of Jesus Christ did not require circumcision.

This was the first great Church Conference after Jesus ascended and it was a great victory for the pure gospel of Christ. But it was not the end of the struggle for Paul. Shortly after that Peter came to the church at Antioch. And Peter sat down at the table of the Gentiles and he ate Gentile foods. Apparently he had

pork barbeque and he ate it with liberty and with a clear conscience because he knew he was free from the Mosaic Law under the gospel. But when his friends from Jerusalem came down, Peter withdrew from the Gentiles and would only eat kosher foods.

Paul, being Christ's chief emissary of the gospel, withstood Peter to his face in front of his friends and called Peter a hypocrite. And Paul thus argued that the Jewish food regulations no longer apply under the gospel of Christ.

You see, the gospel of Jesus Christ is not Jewish. The gospel of Jesus Christ is universal. The Mosaic Law was exclusively Jewish. It was given to them only. And the yoke that was the Law, that impossible burden that hung around their necks, that curse that followed the Jews everywhere they went that was called the Mosaic Law, was exclusively theirs. But the gospel of grace has always been a universal gospel, designed to save red and yellow, black and white.

This dichotomy between Jew and Gentile arose under the Law, not under the gospel. Under the Law, there was a distinction between Jew and Gentile. If you wanted to be under the Law, then it was necessary to become a Jew because the Law was not for Gentiles. But under the gospel of Jesus Christ, any distinction vanishes into thin air because the gospel has always been a universal promise. This is the message of Galatians chapter 3.

Read Galatians 3:8-29

The third chapter of Galatians is a great chapter contrasting two Covenants. Defending his gospel, Paul contrasts the Covenant of Promise that God made to Abraham with the Legal Covenant that God made with Israel. And we have found in our study that the Promise to Abraham is far superior. You cannot read this chapter with an honest eye, without concluding that the Promise to Abraham is superior in every way.

First of all, it should be understood that the Mosaic Law was never a saving Covenant. This was a great mistake that was made by the unbelieving Jews. In their unbelief and in their ignorance, they supposed the Mosaic Law to be a way of

redemption. But the Mosaic Law was never intended for redemption.

For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse.

Galatians 3:10

But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident.

Galatians 3:11

Can anyone read this chapter and draw any other conclusion than the one that says, "The Mosaic Law does not save."

Paul says in verse 11, "it is evident" that no man is justified by the law. And yet it was not evident to the masses of Jews. The Jews obviously knew they were sinners. They knew they had a problem with God. But they looked to the Mosaic Law for their deliverance.

1. They thought the Mosaic Law saved them. Can you imagine? They looked to the Law for deliverance. Even though Paul said,

But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident.

2. They thought there was efficacy in the animal sacrifices. This seems almost incredible, to think that the death of a goat would atone for sins, doesn't it? No rational person would think such a thing. And yet, the Jews began to view the types as the real atoning sacrifices. And so, they brought their lambs and goats and turtledoves year after year thinking that they were saved by the death of animals.

3. They thought they were saved by all the rituals of the Law. When they came to the tabernacle and later the temple, they loved to see all the activity. People were bustling here and there. Money changers were shouting out their prices. It probably was a lot like the stock market. It was loud with activity. And the Jews liked all of this activity because they thought they were saved by all of this religious activity.

4. The Jews thought they were saved by the work of their priests. Every time they came to the temple, these priests were hard at work. Why, they never sat down in the holy places of the temple. There was hustle and bustle and they kept the fires burning and the incense and they performed all the requirements under the Law. And the people were comforted because they thought they were saved by the work of these priests.

5. The Jews also thought they were safe by their mere blood relation to Abraham. "We are children of Abraham," they would say. And though they knew they were sinners, they thought they were cleansed by being related to Abraham by blood.

Note: Isn't there a certain mysticism about the Jews even today? A lot of people think there is some mystical benefit to being a physical descendant of Abraham. "Don't mess with him. He has Abraham's blood running through his veins." You can turn on the television set and there are churches that have the Jewish flag as the chief display in their sanctuary. And virtually every message is about God's plan for the Jews.

Let me say this, God's chief plan was to save the nations! God's dealing with the Jews was under a temporary covenant. God's dealing with the Jews was very ceremonial and typical. His dealing with them in many ways was for our learning and for our benefit.

Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.
I Cor.10:6

Even Paul said, "Not all of Israel is Israel." Romans 9:6. The only thing that this can mean is that national Israel is not the same as spiritual Israel. Some of the Jews were saved. Some of them were God's spiritual people. God saved many out of the nation. But many were not redeemed. God's plan was never to save every individual in the nation of Israel. In fact, it seems that most were not saved. They were children of the Mosaic Covenant. And the Mosaic Covenant was not a saving institution.

For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The Just shall live by faith.

Galatians 3:10, 11

Contrast that then with the Abrahamic Covenant. That covenant is called the gospel. (v.8) Whoever participates in the Abrahamic Covenant shares in the blessings of the gospel, (v.9) the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (v.13) and the inheritance of God. (v.18) In short, God saves by a gracious promise that was made to Abraham and not by a legal arrangement He made with Israel.

Let's review how many ways that gospel promise to Abraham is better than the Covenant made with Israel.

1. Salvation flows through the Abrahamic Covenant, but not through the Mosaic Covenant. The Abrahamic Covenant is the gospel of blessing, (v.8) but the Mosaic Covenant is the vehicle of cursing. (v.10)
2. The operative word under the Abrahamic Covenant is faith, (v.6, 7, 8) whereas the operative word under the Mosaic Covenant is works. (v.10) The Mosaic Covenant is a doing kind of covenant. (v.10; v.12) The Mosaic Covenant says do the law, do it continually and do it perfectly and thou shalt live. The Abrahamic Covenant says believe and thou shalt live. The Law says "do." The Gospel says "done."
3. The Abrahamic Covenant has an eternal purpose of salvation in Christ. Everything was accomplished in Christ. There were no rituals, no ceremonies. God simply told Abraham you are going to have a seed and he will redeem you. This was a promise of salvation indeed. The promise of the Abrahamic Covenant was Christ. But the purpose of the Mosaic Covenant was merely preparatory. It was to prepare the way for Christ.

The Mosaic Covenant served a similar purpose to that of John the Baptist. You remember that John the Baptist served as a forerunner of Christ. He was the herald that went ahead of Christ. He was careful to tell people that he was not the Christ.

But he served a purpose and he paved the way. He set the tone and made the field ripe for harvest. And when Christ finally appeared, John said, "He must increase, and I must decrease." (John 3:30)

In the same way, the Mosaic Law served as a forerunner for Christ. It came before Christ, but when Christ came, the Mosaic Law necessarily came to a sudden end. John the Baptist was taken off the scene almost immediately when Jesus appeared. And the Mosaic Law was taken away when Christ appeared.

Now we talked before about the civil purpose of the Law and the ceremonial purpose of the Law. But also,

4. The Abrahamic Covenant has a spiritual purpose. The spiritual purpose of the Mosaic Law was to take all hope away from the Jews. It was to oppress them day after day. It was to squeeze them and to hem them in. It was to imprison them under a weight of guilt and condemnation.

This is why it says in verse 23, "We were kept under the law and shut up." The Jews were kept under the harsh restraints of the law. They could not escape. They found no relief from the guilt and condemnation of the Law. Did they find salvation in the Law? No, they found just the opposite.

But unless you think the Law was merely an instrument of condemnation on the Jews, you should be aware that there was a merciful intent even to the Law. The goal of the Law was mercy. Look at verse 23. It says that the Law shut them up "unto the faith of Jesus Christ which should afterwards be revealed."

That is, the Law cornered them and left them no escape except through the window of grace. It shut them in so that faith in Christ was the only hope. Look how gracious our God is! Even when he imposed a harsh Law that seemed to condemn, it was a design of mercy.

Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

Galatians 3:24

You can easily see here that the function of the law was to bring the Jews to Christ. That was its principle spiritual function. There was a gracious thread running through the Law after all.

Now make no mistake, the Law was a brutal, condemning force upon unbelieving Israel. And the unbelieving Jews were left to the curses of the Law. But for those in Israel who were the elect of God; those who were really Israel; those who were chosen before the foundation of the world unto salvation in Christ; they were led by the Law to the doorstep of grace. The Law had its proper effect on them. The Law broke them down and left them knocking on the door of grace. It gave them no hope but Christ. And when they came to Christ, Christ opened the door and let them in that they might be justified by faith.

5. The Abrahamic Covenant is forever. (v.17) The Mosaic Covenant was temporary. (v.19) The Abrahamic Covenant is God's eternal and only gospel. The Abrahamic Covenant is the plan of salvation that extends to the end of time. The Mosaic Covenant was added 430 years after the Abrahamic Covenant and it was terminated when the seed came - when Christ came.

If you look at verse 25, you will see once again that the Mosaic Law fades away when Christ comes.

But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

Galatians 3:25

So, the Mosaic Covenant is that lesser covenant. The Abrahamic Covenant is the greater. The Mosaic Covenant was a blip in history. But the promise of the gospel goes on forever.

6. The Abrahamic Covenant was universal in scope. (v.8) The Mosaic Covenant was limited to the Jews. Notice in verses 23-25 that Paul is talking about the Mosaic Law. And he uses the pronoun we.

But before faith came, we were kept under the law.

Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster.

But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

When Paul talks about the Law, he refers to its effects on one nation, Israel. But notice how he switches from “we” to “ye” in verse 26.

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

That is, when you believe in Jesus Christ, you are all the children of God. Jews and Gentiles alike are all included in the gospel of Christ. The Abrahamic Covenant excludes no one. The Abrahamic Covenant does not grant an advantage to any nation or any person. Even the Jews come out from under the schoolmaster with the coming of Christ. (See v.25)

The Abrahamic Covenant opens its arms to the whole world. The Mosaic Covenant on the other hand made a distinction between Jew and Gentile, but not so the gospel that was promised to Abraham.

Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, says Paul.

Paul seems to take aim here at all those who are still trying to cling to those distinctions under the Mosaic Law. They still love the ceremonies; they still love the sacrifices; they still love that old religion of Judaism. They still love to think that God makes a distinction between Jews and Gentiles. But Paul says, “It is not so anymore.” Ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

Galatians 3:27

Here Paul says that if you have been baptized into Christ, that is, if you have been immersed in Him by salvation, if you have believed on Him, then you have put on Christ.

Under Jewish tradition, when a child became a man, he would take off the garment that signified his childhood and he would put on an adult garment. And when we believe in Christ, the picture is that we put on a new garment. And this garment covers up all former distinctions. We are covered with Christ and

prior distinctions make no difference with God.

And look.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:28

There are no special privileges under the gospel. A Jew has no advantage over a Gentile. A free man has no advantage over a slave. A male has no advantage over a female. In Christ we are all one.

This is an important message for Christ's church, because the church is made up of all kinds of people. Christ's church is made up of all nationalities. Christ's church has people of all races. Christ's church has people from all different social strata. There are those who have money in his church and there are those who have none. There are those who are prominent in the community and those who are not. But we are all one in Christ.

Here is the big mistake that Israel made. They thought that they were saved because they were Abraham's seed. But they were not Abraham's seed according to this passage. Christ is Abraham's seed. It was Christ who was the seed of Abraham, not the Jews.

Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many, but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.

Galatians 3:16

Let's close this morning with the last verse of chapter 3.

And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Galatians 3:29

All of the promises of salvation were made to Abraham and his seed. And if you belong to Christ then you are Abraham's seed and the promises belong to you.

You partake of the gospel promises by believing in the work of Jesus Christ. You must forsake all other hope and cling only to the sacrifice of Christ that was made on Calvary. It is a very simple gospel. Jesus died to pay the penalty that should have been imposed on you. If you will have him, then he is yours by faith.