

Sons of Abraham

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[0 : 00] So, as Elliot just mentioned, we are in a series, this is part four, of working through a letter or book of the Bible found in the New Testament called Galatians.

It was written by a man named Paul, around 50 A.D., to a group of fairly new churches in the region of Galatia, which is in present-day Turkey. This letter reads like it was written by a very frustrated, almost angry author, defending the utmost importance of grace, the gospel, and gospel-centered community.

In other words, he was saying that Jesus plus nothing equals everything we could ever need or imagine. He was defending against a slightly different message, which included grace, gospel, and gospel-centered community, but it also included the necessity to continue following the Jewish traditions and practices to kind of complete their salvation, if you will.

This little tweak was slight, and in that time, some might even say that Paul was being worked up over nothing, you know, making a mountain out of a molehill kind of thing. But Paul understood that very slight deviations turn into absolute heresy over time.

Paul understands the subtlety of this thinking. We just learned about one of the original disciples of Christ, Peter, having the same mindset. We learned about that last week. It's also worth mentioning here that the agitators were not evil men.

[1 : 28] They were not demon-possessed crazies. Now, these guys believed in the saving grace of Jesus Christ. They just reasoned that if the father of the nation of Israel, Abraham, believed and had to be circumcised, and every Jew from that point forward, almost 2,000 years' worth, did the same, then certainly Jesus and his followers would continue that same tradition.

They were recreating a works-based righteousness, which was all they ever knew. The gospel of grace through faith in Jesus was a totally new and radical path to righteousness that was and is today almost impossible to wrap your mind around.

How can a holy, righteous, perfect God extend grace and provide a way to complete holiness to you and I without any form of effort on our part?

This is a really good point.

We say and act a certain way on Sundays and during the week when we're at community groups, but some of us are no different than everyone the other days of the week. You know what?

[3 : 02] I certainly lived that life for a long time, and I bet if you were completely honest with yourselves, you could say the same. Paul addresses this exact issue in today's passage, starting in Galatians 3, 1 through 18.

He says, That is absolutely critical to understand.

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.

So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse, for it is written, Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them.

Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for the righteous shall live by faith. But the law is not of faith. Rather, the one who does them shall live by them.

[4 : 51] Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. For it is written, Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree. So that in Christ Jesus, the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised spirit through faith.

To give a human example, brothers, even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified. Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, and to offsprings, referring to many, but referring to one, and to your offspring, who is Christ.

This is what I mean. The law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise.

But God gave it to Abraham by a promise. This is the word of God. In the first two chapters of Galatia, we learn about the people of Galatia being wrong about the gospel.

Now starting in chapter 3, he begins to explain the why they were wrong. He is presenting four theological themes which are essential not only to the original audience, but are absolutely true to all of us today.

[6 : 07] The first one being, we receive the spirit through faith, not works. Galatians 3.2 says, He is saying, Of course, the answer is the second choice.

They receive the spirit as a free gift through their faith in Jesus. There is nothing they could do or nothing we can do to earn this gift. The problem with Christianity today is many of us forget the initial encounter with Christ and the Holy Spirit, and we feel like there must be more.

There must be a greater adventure somewhere else, another way that we can get closer to Jesus, another way that we can mature. He freely gives us everything when we are saved.

We don't work our way through the ranks to obtain a higher level of salvation. No, the Bible says that we are full and complete heirs of God. We are not half-children.

We are his children for all of eternity. This guy right here named Charles Blondin. In 1859, he became the first tightrope walker to cross Niagara Falls.

[7 : 38] The rope was two inches wide and spanned about 1,100 feet at about 160 feet above the water. He crossed Niagara many times, every time pulling off a new feat, including one time he stopped in the middle halfway, pulled up a bottle of wine from a boat below, and drank a glass of wine standing on the thing.

He went backwards. He went blindfolded. He went in a sack one time. He somersaulted a cross one time. He even once stopped halfway through to eat an omelet, which is crazy.

The fame of these endeavors increased dramatically, though, when he asked for volunteers to ride on his back across the rope. Can you imagine that?

The first volunteer was actually his manager. I guess Blondin figured it was time for this guy to start really earning his pay. Before they began, Blondin told him to become one with himself and not to try balancing on his own.

Imagine this. Imagine what might have happened if they were about halfway across and the manager started becoming really comfortable and thought to himself, I got this. He's making this look really easy.

[8 : 51] How hard can it really be, you know? You know, one foot in front of the other, keep your balance, no big deal. Imagine him telling Charles, Charles, just put me down, man. I got this.

You go ahead and I'll see you on the other side. Charles would have called this guy a fool and tried to talk him out of it. The next day's headlines would have read, Charles Blondin's manager fell to his death crossing Niagara Falls.

Blondin asked, who's next? Full story on page two. Some of you millennials didn't even get that. You don't even have a clue what a newspaper is. It's ridiculous. Of course, they're all sitting over there.

Yeah. Yeah. Now, his response would have been like, I've crossed Niagara several times and not once have you taken the first step.

Now, all of a sudden, you think you can finish. Really? Paul's response to the region of Galatia is exactly how Charles Blondin would have responded to such a foolish request from his manager.

[9 : 54] First words, oh, foolish Galatians. The Greek word here means witless or brainless. In other words, he's not paying them a compliment.

Verse three is stating this exact argument. Having begun in the spirit, are you now going to be perfected in the flesh? In other words, if you were not able to even begin the process of righteousness, how do you think you can complete this task by works of your own strength?

The issue at hand is that even though this was written thousands of years ago, it still holds truth to our mentality today. Those of us in the room that are Christians know that it was by faith in Jesus that saved us.

No question about that. We are saved by grace. But somewhere down the road from that point, we begin to believe that faith alone isn't enough. We think, I need to do the right things to grow, to

mature.

If we think it is up to us to grow, then we are mistaken. When Paul refers to perfected by the flesh, he is referring to their circumcision. Now, it's obvious to us that removing a portion of your skin will not substitute for all the other messed up thoughts and actions we have.

[11:11] But to them, it was a huge step in the right direction. I believe Paul was referring to a much larger theological idea of what the Bible often refers to as our flesh or worldly desires.

You see, we have our literal flesh, our skin and bones, and we have our spiritual flesh. We all know our flesh is not perfect, right? We age. We get hungry.

We have wrinkles. Maybe gain a few pounds. A little muffin top. Get sick. Etc. And all those things, in this culture today, we spend billions of dollars a year to prevent, hide, or temporarily forget about. We also have our spiritual flesh that is any and everything unholy. You can fill in the blanks.

Anything and everything that is unholy in your thought process, your actions.

Don't be shy. So Paul is saying that if our flesh is imperfect, and we all know it is, how in the world can we obtain perfection when using an imperfect tool or means to do so?

[12:22] If we are to do anything, it is simply to hear the good news or gospel over and over and over until the point our faith in Jesus and his perfection helps us receive the Spirit.

Excuse me. The second theological claim he says is we become righteous through faith, not works. This is where Abraham is introduced in this passage. Verse 5 says, Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law or by hearing with faith, just as Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness?

Many of you may be wondering who this Abraham guy is, and I think that might be worth giving you some background to understand the point Paul is trying to make. Abraham lived approximately 2,000 years before Jesus.

It's approximately 4,000 years ago. When Abraham was born, there was no nation of Israel. There were no Ten Commandments, no laws. God had not even revealed his plan to redeem humanity from the curse of sin, from Adam and Eve.

So way back in the first book of the Bible, Genesis chapter 12, God reveals himself to Abraham. In verses 1 through 3 of chapter 12 in Genesis, Now the Lord said to Abraham, Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you, and I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing.

[13:53] I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Man, that is a great promise, and one that would cause you and me to be blown away.

The truth is that Abraham continues to grow old with no son, no heir, has no children, and logic would lead me to think, how in the world is this promise going to become truth?

A few chapters later, Genesis 15, 5, and 6, it says, And he brought him outside and said, this is God speaking to Abraham, Look toward heaven and number the stars, if you are able to number them. Then he said to him, So shall your offspring be. And he, Abraham, believed the Lord, and he counted to him as righteousness.

Now for context sake, you have to understand that at this point in Abraham's life, him and his wife Sarah are somewhere between 80 and 100 years old, and God just told them they're going to start a family.

[15:02] I am half their age, 45. I have five kids, and I assure you that we are done. Right, babe? Yeah, that's right. That's right. I cover your bases, you know, make a statement like that, you know what I'm saying?

Abraham's response was not what you might think at that stage of his life. He simply said, Okay. Okay, God, you say it. That's cool. If God said it was going to happen, then Abraham simply believed.

100%. No doubts. No fears. This was to show that this could only happen through God. In no way could man claim to have helped or make this plan happen.

But it also shows the righteousness of Abraham was only through his faith in God. It was later on that God requested the covenant established with Abraham be marked by circumcision.

It was a long time further down the road. Circumcision was never, ever meant to be an act performed by man to obtain righteousness. It was merely meant to be a symbol.

[16:07] The faith Abraham had in the promise of God is what made him righteous, not the act or the work. This is the point Paul is making to the Galatians and what I believe God is saying to you and I today.

Some people may argue that it was the act of Abraham's faith that he earned the righteousness of God. However, that is not what scripture says. It doesn't say his faith was righteousness, rather that it was counted as righteousness.

The faith he had was considered righteous, not the act of having faith. It's very important. The moment we are told about the righteousness of Abraham is when he is actually doing the least. He merely says, okay, to the promise of God. He had already done way more and his righteousness was never mentioned. Me personally, if I had taken my whole family, all my possessions and moved to an unknown location just because God told me to go and later on if I had taken my only son and was going to willingly sacrifice him because God told me, I believe I would have earned at least a little bit of favor of righteousness.

Nope. God speaks of Abraham's righteousness when he does the absolute least thing possible. Okay. Verse 17 in Galatians 3 says, this is what I mean.

[17:29] The law which came 430 years afterward does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God so as to make the promise void. For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise.

but God gave it to Abraham by promise. Paul is clearly stating to the Galatians that if Abraham, the father of their faith, did not rely on works to obtain salvation, why would they need to start it now? 430 years before the law existed, God gave Abraham a promise that he fully received by faith. This same principle applies to Christians today.

We believe in Jesus and through faith in him we become righteous. It has nothing to do with our good works or behavior. Now with that being said, should we obey the rules of God? Absolutely. They are put in place as a means to protect us from our sinful nature, but they are in no way a means to obtain salvation. many Christians have no issue with saying that it is by faith that I am saved, but many of us fall into the trap that it is up to me to become mature, to become a mature Christian is up to me.

[18:44] Nope. We are not only saved by faith and grace, we mature by the same means, faith and grace. We tend to think the main points of this letter to the Galatians is that number one, we are saved by faith and number two, we are made righteous by faith.

That is the truth that we hold here at One Harbor. That we are saved by faith and we are made righteous by faith. But there are many other scholars, very, very smart people that have argued that these two are important for sure, but they believe the main idea of this letter is to determine who are the people of God.

This was not an issue for the people of Israel. They were born in the God's covenantal agreement with Abraham. They were his chosen people. Now the Gentiles were non-Jewish people.

Now they've been included in the mix. Like I mentioned earlier, the tradition of circumcision would only be a natural fit for including non-Jews into the family of God. You're going to come into the family of God, you have to be circumcised.

Paul's answer to that issue is clearly a resounding no. Verse 7 says, Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.

[19:57] 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. So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

We are God's covenant people by faith. The sons of Abraham Paul is referring to in this passage is not just the biological descendants of Abraham with whom God chose to form a covenant with.

No, Paul is referring to anyone who has faith in Jesus. Because of your faith, my faith, in Jesus as the risen son of God, we are now members of the family of Abraham, the original father of faith.

This issue was controversial back then and is still controversial to this day. Paul is not saying there are separate tiers of children with the ethnic Jewish people being the first tier and all the others, you know, being a distant second.

Paul is saying that through faith, the church or body of Christ has become God's chosen people.

Paul continues this argument in much greater depth in the book of Romans, one of my favorite books of the Bible.

[21 : 15] Romans 9, 4, and 5 says, they are Israelites and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promise. To them belong the patriarchs and from their race according to the flesh is the Christ who is God over all blessed forever.

Amen. What a powerful statement concerning the Jews and the relationship they have with the God of the universe. But let's continue reading. Verse 6 says, But it is not as though the word of God has failed.

For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel. And not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring. But through Isaac shall your offspring be named.

This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. Thank you, Lord.

Paul is clearly stating to a Gentile audience that being counted as a child of God has nothing to do with genetics and everything to do with having faith in God. The point trying to be made is not that being Jew is a good thing or a bad thing, just like being a Gentile is a good thing or a bad thing.

[22 : 29] No, the point is that our nationality or our Ancestry.com family history is irrelevant when it comes to being a member of the family of God. What matters is who do I put my faith, trust, and hope in?

Is it going to be a set of laws and traditions that may make me appear to be a good person on the outside with my heart dying on the inside? Or am I going to come to Jesus with faith and be released from the burdens of this world?

To be fully counted as a member of the family of Abraham and the covenant established with him by God so many years ago. Your faith and your faith alone in Christ Jesus is the only way this goal can be met.

No amount of striving, sacrifice, fasting, work, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera will make you righteous. It is only obtained by the free gift of grace extended and paid for by Jesus Christ.

Because through our faith in Christ Jesus we are now sons and daughters of Abraham, the story of his descendants now becomes very personal to you and I. To read story after story throughout the Old Testament of God's faithfulness to his people, rescuing them from Egypt, providing for their every need in the wilderness, providing for them their own land where they could prosper and multiply, faithfully taking them back after failing to uphold their end of the covenant again and again and again.

[24 : 01] Sound familiar? Just as God forgave the people of Israel time and again he is faithful to forgive us not by earning his favor back by works but faith in the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

One might think at this point well why don't I have to work out my salvation and righteousness like Abraham? I mean isn't he the father of our faith? Paul addresses this question very clearly during this passage arguably more clearly than any other of his writings.

In verse 10 it says for all who rely on works of the law are under a curse for it is written curse be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law and do them.

Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law for the righteous shall live by faith but the law is not of faith rather the one who does them shall live by them.

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us for it is written curse is everyone who is hanged on a tree so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles so that we might receive the promised spirit through faith.

[25 : 14] The final point is we are redeemed by faith. Paul is quoting Deuteronomy there in verse 10 he is stating that trying to live under the law is impossible for anyone to keep.

Jesus went after the best law abiding citizens of that day the Pharisees trying to make the point that the best of the best are utter failures at abiding by the law.

Even if they were able to maintain a facade the motives of the hearts were impure which in turn made them guilty of breaking the law. This only proved his case even more.

He was proven again and again that without a savior there would be no hope of obtaining righteousness and thus our salvation. We are all cursed because it is impossible to obey all the laws all the time.

In verse 13 Paul says Christ redeemed us from that curse but how? He did it because he became the curse. He didn't redact it or release us from it.

[26 : 21] No, he took the curse. our curse away from you and me and hung himself on the cross. 2 Corinthians 5 21 says for our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Paul says that cursed is everyone hung on a tree. In the law of that day everyone who was executed was hung on a tree to signify them being cursed.

They had been rejected by God. The specific way Christ was executed crucifixion was not by chance. It was to signal to all that he became cursed.

That sign is still true and relevant to you and I today. Christ became a curse for our sins. He willingly left perfection to pay the price for a curse for our curse under the law.

With this truth in mind why would we think that living under a curse would ever lead to righteousness? Those that may not believe this I understand. This doesn't make any logical sense.

[27 : 32] It's definitely one of those too good to be true things. You may be saying all I have to do is believe. All I have to say is yes. Well the answer is yes.

So long as you believe in your heart. It doesn't have to be head knowledge. It has to be head knowledge and heart knowledge. You have to believe in your heart. Charles Blondin's manager had to know in his heart his entire being that they were going to make it to the other side.

Otherwise he never would have climbed on his back. As the band comes up if you're here and not yet a Christian I cannot tell you that trying to live a good life and being a moral person is the key to finding that fulfillment.

being a productive member of society or having a successful military career will cause your life to be complete. No. I'm telling you today that having faith in Jesus as the son of God is the only way where you can be relieved of the guilt and shame of living a life under a curse.

No one, no one in the history of the world has been able to accomplish that goal without faith in Jesus. I assure you if you are completely honest with yourself today you know you're not the first.

[28 : 53] If you're here today and you are a Christian I'm encouraging you to take this time to reflect on your motives. Are you and I are we trying to acknowledge the necessity for faith in Jesus to obtain salvation but we're feeling like there has to be more?

Can you look over your shoulder and see a life full of grace and mercy or a life striving to earn righteousness? Our righteousness is never earned.

It is a free gift only obtained through faith. Let's be a people that live a life of grace and mercy toward ourselves and others because of our faith in Jesus and never because of anything we have ever done.

As we reflect today on the passage we always respond through communion which I think is absolutely wonderful and I wish it was possible for me personally to do it more often than once a week.

I need it. To remind ourselves of the ultimate sacrifice Jesus paid for us by the broken body represented by the bread and his shed blood represented by the juice that covered all of our sins, all of our imperfections, all of our impure thoughts.

[30 : 09] He covered all of those not only for our past sins but for our today's sins but for all of eternity. Because of him if you're a Christian today you are a son or a daughter of the God of the universe.

How awesome is that? If you're here today and you're not a Christian it doesn't make sense for you to partake in this meal but you certainly can. You can say yes. You can say yes to Jesus.

You can believe in your hearts that Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior and I would welcome you to come and take that meal. Let's pray.

God you are so awesome. Just because you love us, just because you want to have a relationship with us for all of eternity you made the way the only way possible.

You came and lived the perfect life and died a horrific death and yet you live today risen ruler of all the universe. We're so thankful for that truth God.

[31 : 18] We're so thankful that you prayed the way that even though we strive and we work and we think that we can earn our salvation or our righteousness it is only by your faith, by our faith in you that we can obtain this goal.

I pray that that truth will resonate in our hearts, in our minds, in our souls that it would find good soil, that that truth of grace would just produce an abundance of fruit in our lives, that we would be people that share the good news or gospel of Jesus Christ in every opportunity we have, no matter

where we are, not only here on Sundays where it's easy, but in our next door neighbor, our family members, our co-workers, people that are dying, people that are overdosing, people that are alcoholics, people that are trying every which way to fill that void in their life, may we be your mouthpieces, your hands and your feet to proclaim the good news, to give them hope, not only for today but for all of eternity.

So thankful for that, God. Have your way in our lives today and then we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.