

March 25, 2007

“A Life of Grace All Along”  
Galatians 3:6-9

FCF: Waywardness regarding obvious things

**PROPOSITION:** (anchor) We must rest in Christ alone.

(magnet) Shown forth in the Scripture from beginning to end.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

I came across an interesting phrase last week. “*You must not measure God’s corn with your bushel.*” In its context, the author was getting at the need not to sell short the power of God’s love, His determination to save, His ability to pardon. It’s something akin to Isaiah’s words (**READ Isaiah 55:8-9**). This is not just about the LORD being all-wise and all-powerful. It’s about Him being all-gracious as well – beyond our fathoming. And it’s the very thing Paul’s readers, then and now, need to hear again and again.

**SCRIPTURE READING:** **Galatians 3:1-9**

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

Perhaps you’ve heard the song (**READ “Father Abraham”**):

*Father Abraham had many sons,  
And many sons had Father Abraham;  
I am one of them, and so are you,  
So let’s all praise the Lord!*

Simple melody. Easily remembered. Profound theology. Easily forgotten. So much so that, despite how well they had been taught by Paul, the Galatians had begun to sing another song, one that sounds so very similar, but is not nearly so pleasant and should not be sung. Philip Ryken, in his commentary, penned it this way (**READ Ryken, p.95**):

*Father Abraham had many sons,  
And many sons had Father Abraham;  
I am one of them, but you are not,  
So let’s all get together for a little procedure we like to call circumcision.*

Paul’s opponents, the Judaizers (folks who said the finished work of Christ was not quite and there was more to be done to be secure in God’s sight), knew their Old Testament. At least they thought they did. They saw themselves as “sons of Abraham.” They were concerned with how we are justified before God. And rightly so. How can sinners stand before the judgment of a holy God? What hope can we have? Great question! They had an answer. It was “by grace almost, through faith almost, in Christ almost” one could be justified. Genesis 17 – Abraham was commanded to be circumcised. So they said, “*Keep the commands, obey the rules, walk the line and you will be safe.*” “*No, you won’t,*” said Paul (**READ Galatians 2:15-16**). “*Your problem is too deep. You cannot be justified by the law because you cannot obey the law. You need Jesus.*”

Last week we saw Paul stressing this is “a life of grace through and through,” that we need to rest in Christ alone and this is borne out in the experience of His followers. This week, Paul stresses the same thing and that this is shown forth in the Scriptures from beginning to end – the message that was there “all along.” It is a life of grace through and through. And this has been the case all along (**READ Galatians 3:7**). The mention of Abraham was the bridge from one point to the next. “*You know this was the case with Abraham. Now know that it is the case with you as well. Our rest is in Christ alone.*”

**I. WHAT IT INVOLVES – IMPUTATION**

Now, look with me as to how Paul explains this (**READ Galatians 3:6**). The Judaizers were camped out on God’s words to Abraham in Genesis 17. Paul goes further

back to Genesis 15 (**READ Genesis 15:1-6**). What is being described here is an “imputed” righteousness or what Martin Luther described as an “alien righteousness.”

*A) Not Made Righteous*

Not that Abraham was somehow immediately transformed and made righteous.

1. Events of Abraham’s life

If you keep reading into Genesis 16, you see this in the affair with Hagar, taking the outworking of this promise into his own hands. If you go further on into chapter 20, you see it again when, out of fear of a king, Abraham pretends his wife was his sister.

2. Evidence from Abraham’s life

When Abraham was “counted” righteous, his character was not immediately transformed.

*B) But Counted Righteous*

1. Definition

But his legal standing before God was. That’s what the terminology means – “regarded, reckoned, accounted, considered righteous.” Abraham had been justified by God.

2. Implication

His legal state before the Judge of all the earth had been changed. A declaration made.

*Illustration:*

This week I came across the story of the German astronomer, William Herschel. As a young man, Herschel was part of a military band when his nation went to war. But he felt totally unprepared for the horrors he saw. And so, during an intense battle, he fled the field. Knowing the penalty for desertion was death, he escaped to England to pursue studies in music and science. Eventually he became famous, renowned through Europe.

Years later, his past caught up with him. Another German had arrived in Britain, George, crowned King of England. George knew Herschel’s past and summoned him to appear before the royal court. With trepidation, Herschel went. He went to the palace and was ushered into a chamber. The king’s servant brought him a document. Herschel opened it. It read, “*I, George, pardon you for your past offenses against our native land.*” A royal pardon. His crime was not overlooked. But he was acquitted. Justified before the court. Unrighteous as he was, he was counted righteous before the king.

*Application:*

Now understand that if you are a Christian, unrighteous as you are, you are counted righteous before God. He has done it. It’s His work. Your status is secured. So don’t let your unrighteousness undo you. Justification – your being right before God – is not about your making yourself righteous. It’s about Him declaring you righteous.

So don’t let your unrighteousness undo you. You looked where you shouldn’t have. You’ve said what you shouldn’t have. You’ve loved and hated all the wrong things – again! Listen. Yes, you need to examine your life, repent of your sin. Yes, you need to pray for His strength, seek the support of others. Yes, you need to strive not to presume upon His love. What you’ve done is wrong and those are the right responses.

But hear me. Hear me. Christian, your sin does not change your status. Your sin does not change your status. By His accounts (which are the only accounts that matter), you are righteous in His sight. And that’s what the Bible has been saying all along.

**II. HOW IT COMES – FAITH**

This imputed righteousness is a wondrous thing – not just to behold but to hold! Well, how does it become ours? (**READ Galatians 3:6-9**) Through faith. Through faith.

*A) Knowing*

### 1. Explanation

Knowing what God has said in the gospel. Obviously, we must hear in order to know what it is that must be believed. Faith begins with the facts before us, the issues at hand.

### 2. Example from Abraham

We see that with Abraham. God spoke and Abraham listened. He knew.

#### B) *Believing*

### 1. Explanation

He knew and he believed. It's another part of faith – a real openness, a believing, an accepting of what God is saying, hearing it and acknowledging it to be true.

### 2. Example from Abraham's life

Again, we see that with Abraham. Despite the impossibility of the promise, he believed.

#### C) *Trusting*

### 1. Explanation

Which takes us to the third component – trusting. Not just knowing and believing but committing oneself to the gospel, to God Himself. The Puritans had a word for this – “recumbency” – leaning with all one's weight. To stake all you have on what He's said.

### 2. Example from Abraham's life

Again, we see this with Abraham. He cast himself on the faithfulness of God, looked to Him alone for guidance, provision, deliverance, and ultimately, salvation.

Note what Paul is saying. All of this took place, Abraham being justified by faith, before there were any works. Genesis 15, the promise, comes before Genesis 17, circumcision. In fact, not only was he justified before his works, Abraham was justified despite his works. Just read of his faithless days in Egypt before pharaoh in Genesis 12.

The point is that the Galatians had heard this message – that justification is “through faith alone.” Paul had preached it clearly to them (**READ Acts 13:38-39**).

#### *Application:*

It is through faith in what Christ has done and not through determination in what we do. And this is so clearly stated. John Stott puts it this way (**READ Stott, p.75**):

*The gospel offers blessings; what must we do to receive them? The proper answer is “nothing”! We do not have to do anything. We have only to believe. Our response is not “the works of the law” but “hearing with faith”, that is, not obeying the law, but believing the gospel. For obeying is to attempt to do the work of salvation ourselves, whereas believing is to let Christ be our Savior and to rest in His finished work.*

It is through faith. And here's the thing. It need not be perfect. It need not be perfect.

#### *Illustration:*

A trembling hand may receive even the greatest of gifts. Years ago, the greatest of messages were sent along the slenderest threads. Now we send them through the air. The issue is not the strength of the faith. The issue is where the faith has been placed – and in whom. And the clear message here is that if it is in Christ alone, that is enough.

### **III. WHO IT'S FOR – FOR US ALL**

Which brings us to the last point – who this is for (**READ Galatians 3:7-9**). The Judaizers said, in essence, it was “those of works” who were sons of Abraham. And Paul said, “No, it is those of faith.” And again, he was alluding back to promises made to Abraham in Genesis (**READ Genesis 12:1-3**). The point in all of this is simply that the blessing of justification through faith is not for a few but for all – for all who believe.

#### A) *For Those on the “Inside”*

1. To the Jewish Christians – this is how you got here

It is for those on the “inside” – in this case, Jewish Christians, those who were, “raised in the church,” and can hardly remember a day when they weren’t. And Paul is saying, “Look, this is how you got here. It wasn’t your pedigree. It wasn’t your resume.”

2. Don’t forget it

And don’t forget it. Certainly, Paul was a model for this (**READ Philippians 3:2-8**).

*B) For Those on the “Outside”*

1. To the Gentile Christians – this is how you got here

Jewish Christians, those raised in the church, remember how you got here. And, again, in this case, to Gentile Christians, to those “on the outside,” you who can’t hardly remember a time when you were here, Paul is saying, “Look, this is how you got here. Despite what’s on your resume, despite your pedigree. This is how you got here.”

2. Don’t forget it

And don’t you forget it. Don’t you forget it. And don’t let anyone tell you differently.

Again, this is what the Galatians had heard from Paul already. This is the way it was intended to be (**Acts 13:47-49; Isaiah 49:5-6**). Who is this for? For all who believe.

*Illustration:*

Some of you may know of the recent celebration of pi – not the pastry, the number that’s used to determine the relationship between a circle’s diameter and its circumference. Now, I want you to imagine a circle – that’s what we’re talking about here. Yes, it has a line clearly defined. But its diameter, its circumference, is oh so wide.

*Application:*

This is a message for us all – to the proud and the despairing. Listen – each and all of you at any level where you are proud or despairing. There’s nothing you could have done. There’s nothing you could have done. And there’s nothing you need to do. Jesus has already done it. Again, what is the message? Jesus Christ crucified. The hope of the gospel – held forth from the very beginning. It’s been a life of grace all along.

**CONCLUSION:**

Back to William Herschel. The document the king gave him began by pronouncing him “not guilty” but went on to say that for his service as a musician and a scientist, he was to be granted a knighthood. From that point on, he was one of the king’s knights, honored throughout the kingdom as “Sir William Herschel.” When he was justified, not only was he declared righteous but a friend of the king as well. This deserter a friend of the king, one of his court, of his trusted subjects and servants! Think of the turnaround in William Herschel’s life made secure by the pardon of his king!

In many ways, this is exactly what Abraham experienced. And Paul’s readers in Galatia as well. Now, here’s the wonder of it all. It can be ours – made right with God by grace through faith and made a friend of God as well. And there’s nothing we have to do for it’s already been done. We don’t have to be circumcised, to become Jewish, to keep the law, to get worked up, caught up, cleaned up, prayed up, read up, or spit up. There’s nothing we have to do. Simply believe. And God will count you righteous.

If this scandalizes you, if you’re wondering if you heard this right, skeptical that the grace of God could be that good and could reach that far, then you’ve heard it. If you’re wondering if it really could cover your sin, you’ve heard it. If it puzzles you and pulls you at the same time, you’ve heard it. If it makes you want to go from this place as a friend of the King and all His subjects, you’ve heard it. And how we need to hear it.

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(magnet) Shown forth in the Scripture from beginning to end.