

Galatians 3:1-9 – The True Sons of Abraham

Paul preached the essential and all sufficient cross of Christ. Justification, being declared righteous before God, is by grace alone, by faith alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone. If anyone teaches “faith plus...” then they are teaching a false gospel and a message of justification by works. Any message involving a works based justification nullifies the grace of God and robs Christ’s death of its meaning, power and purpose. After Paul had told the Galatians about how Peter had muddied the gospel of grace, he turned to the Galatians and their departure from the one true gospel.

Read Galatians 3:1-5.

Paul called the Galatians “foolish”. This is a word which is used in contrast to someone who is wise. The Galatians weren’t thinking. They weren’t using the brains God gave them. How were the Galatians acting foolishly? (3:1)

What did Paul mean when he said that the Galatians were “bewitched”? Who bewitched them? (3:1)

What was the focus of Paul’s preaching? What was the focus of the trouble makers’ teaching? (3:1)

Paul asked the Galatians some questions to engage their minds. How had the Galatians received the Holy Spirit? How did Cornelius, a Gentile, receive the Holy Spirit in Acts 10:44-45? (3:2)

Philippians 1:6 says “he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” This verse teaches that God begins the work of salvation and God completes the work. The words “began” and “bring to completion” are the same words, in the original language, that are found in Galatians 3:3. The Galatians began by the Spirit. How were the Galatians trying to complete the work God began in them? (3:3)

How had the Galatians experienced God’s Spirit and power among them? (3:4-5)

Read Galatians 3:6-9.

The Galatians seemed to want to hear about Jewish traditions and history so Paul expounded some Old Testament passages for them. Jews are identified as children of Abraham. As the Jews proudly proclaimed to Jesus in John 8:39, "Abraham is our father." Paul's Old Testament lesson began with Abraham. Paul quoted from Genesis 15:6. How was Abraham counted as righteous? What is the context of Genesis 15:6? What did God promise to Abraham in Genesis 15:4-5? Was God's promise given as a one-way covenant or as a two-way covenant. An example of a one-way covenant is a will. I don't need to perform any work to receive benefits from a will. An example of a two-way covenant is a contract job where I agree to do a specific task and in return I receive a specific amount of money.

The troublemakers were telling the Galatians that they needed to be circumcised before they could be righteous in the eyes of God. Was Abraham declared righteous before or after he received circumcision? See Genesis 17:9-14 and Romans 4:9-12. What is the obvious conclusion from this sequence of events?

According to verse 7, who are the true sons of Abraham? Were Ishmael and Esau physical descendants of Abraham? Were they heirs of the promise given to Abraham? In John 8:44, Jesus said to some Jews who claimed "Abraham is our father" that their father was the devil. He said that the devil was their father because they believed in lies and wanted to kill Jesus. Their behavior was consistent with the devil and not with Abraham.

In verse 8, Paul again quoted Genesis 12:3. What was the gospel which was preached to Abraham?

How can Abraham be our father even if we are not physical descendants of Abraham? (3:9) See Romans 4:16-17.

James 2:21 says "and was not Abraham our father justified by works". James 2:22 says that Abraham's "faith was completed by his works". James 2:24 says "a person is justified by works and not by faith alone." How do you reconcile these statements with Galatians? What issue was Paul dealing with? What issue was James dealing with? Luther said that while we are justified by faith alone it is not a faith that is alone. What he meant by that is that true faith produces fruit, or in the terms of James, "works".