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Sermon Notes

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Blessed by Faith or Cursed by Law

Galatians 3:6-14

I. The Eternity and Unity of God's Salvation Plan

A. Eternity: A Plan Formed Before the Foundation of the World

1. Before the world began, God planned everything He would do concerning the history of the world... the centerpiece of this was human salvation in Jesus Christ
2. We should not imagine God's plan of salvation was something He hastily concocted on the fly, or that God was responding to new circumstances
3. Many passages teach this:

1 Corinthians 2:7 we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began.

2 Timothy 1:9-10 has saved us and called us to a holy life-- not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, ¹⁰ but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus

Titus 1:2 a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time

Ephesians 1:4-5 he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ

1 Peter 1:19-20 the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. ²⁰ He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.

4. Therefore, as history began, God knew exactly what was going to happen

B. Unity: Every Sinner Saved in the Same Way

1. Hebrews 11 traces out the history of saving faith from Abel's sacrifice, Enoch's walking with God, and Noah's ark-building... the clear message is that from the very beginning of history, sinners were saved by FAITH, not works
2. Romans 4 teaches that Abraham and David (and therefore all OT saints) were justified by faith in the promised Christ... they looked ahead to Christ based on the promises of God... just as we look BACK by faith
3. Every single sinner that has ever been forgiven and made right with God has been so based only on faith, not ever on works

C. Powerful Answer to the Judaizers

1. The Judaizers were certainly quoting scriptures constantly on the issue of CIRCUMCISION and LAW-KEEPING
2. No doubt they were very intimidating to these Gentile believers who had only recently become familiar with the religion of the Jews and with the Scriptures
3. The Judaizers were able to quote line upon line of Old Testament scripture... and almost certainly silenced these new Gentile converts
4. So it is left to a JEW... the Apostle Paul... to rise up and defend these new Gentile converts; and he does so brilliantly, showing that the Old Testament Scripture actually teaches justification by faith alone, apart from works
5. Thus the Judaizers were misusing scripture, and missing some key insights from scripture on what God had always intended for the salvation of sinners around the world
6. Paul puts them powerfully in their place here!

D. Powerful Encouragement to Us

1. Paul also give to every Christian that has ever lived since then a powerful encouragement about God's salvation plan
2. From the very beginning of human history, God has been saving sinners simply by faith... we are JUSTIFIED BY FAITH not by works
3. We are FREE from the condemnation of the Law!
4. And someday, when we die, we will be welcomed at the feasting table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven on the EXACT SAME BASIS as them!!

Matthew 8:11 I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.

E. Positive and Negative proof of Justification by Faith FROM SCRIPTURE

1. Galatians 3:1-5... Paul has appealed to the Galatians' own experience with the gospel and with the Spirit

Galatians 3:1-5 You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. ² I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? ³ Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? ⁴ Have you suffered so much for nothing-- if it really was for nothing? ⁵ Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?

2. Now Paul turns to the proof from Scripture... the Old Testament
3. Paul's first evidence is POSITIVE... showing that justification by faith not works is displayed in the Old Testament... specifically in the life of Abraham
 - a. From that, we will draw a powerful implication: WE ALSO CAN BE CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM... justified by faith like Abraham was
4. Paul's second evidence is NEGATIVE... showing that the Law CANNOT justify but only bring CURSES
 - a. From that, we will draw another powerful implication: WE ALSO CAN BE BLESSED IN CHRIST, NOT CURSED BY LAW

II. Positive Old Testament Proof: Abraham Justified by Faith

A. Centerpiece of Paul's Argument: Abraham, the Father of the Jewish Nation

Galatians 3:6 Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

1. Brilliant strategy by the Apostle Paul...
2. Certainly the Judaizers were claiming to have all the history and writings of Judaism on their side... they could overwhelm their debating opponents with passage after passage from the Jewish scripture PROVING that God wanted them to obey the Laws of Moses to be saved

3. The poor Galatians were GENTILES and had very little recourse to rebut these Jewish arguments... that's why they were caving in so quickly to this false gospel
4. But the Apostle Paul cannot be so easily intimidated and overwhelmed... no one could pull rank on Paul or dazzle him with scripture
5. Paul rises up as a defender of the defenseless Gentiles... and his awesome knowledge of the Jewish scriptures is used to prove Justification by Faith Alone
6. Paul reaches for the father of the Jewish nation, Abraham; the original Jewish man... proving that Abraham was in fact an uncircumcised Gentile when he was justified by faith
7. What is more, Paul proves that Abraham's experience was a paradigm for all people who would follow... Jew or Gentile... Every person who would ever be saved in history would be saved the exact same way as Abraham!!!
8. Awesome assertion here: Abraham was JUSTIFIED BY FAITH, NOT BY LAW
9. Galatians 3:1-5, Paul was speaking of the experience of the Galatians... how they received the gift of the Holy Spirit by simply hearing the gospel of Christ crucified and believing it... HEARING WITH FAITH
 - a. The gift of the Holy Spirit is PROOF of justification... PROOF of the forgiveness of sins... PROOF of a right standing with God
 - b. And the Galatian Christians received this gift of the Holy Spirit simply by faith... by HEARING THE GOSPEL WITH FAITH
10. Verse 6 begins with the words "JUST AS" or "EVEN AS"... and then Paul brings up the case of Abraham:

ESV Galatians 3:6 ...just as Abraham "believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"?

- a. In other words, the Galatians were justified in the exact same way as was Abraham, the Father of the Jewish nation
- b. Their experience of justification was on the exact same basis as was Abraham's twenty centuries earlier
- c. And how is that? By simple faith
- d. Abraham "believed God"

- i) Not “Abraham believed IN God” (He did, but that’s not what Paul says here)
 - ii) But “Abraham BELIEVED GOD...” (specifically, believed God when He spoke a promise to him”)
- e. “and it was CREDITED TO HIM as righteousness”
- i) The word is an accounting term... credited like wiring a huge sum of money to a numbered account
 - ii) Also it’s related to thinking on God’s part: God THOUGHT of Abraham as righteous because of his faith
 - iii) Conclusion: Abraham was declared by God to be righteous in His sight, not because of works of the Law but by faith
11. The powerful insight: Abraham is a PATTERN of salvation for all who would follow him, for all his children, for all nations
12. The exact same way Abraham was saved, every sinner is saved who will be saved
13. This one man’s example is the pattern for ALL NATIONS

B. God’s Original Saving Purpose: All Nations

1. This is clear in Genesis 12... the original call of Abram:

Genesis 12:1-3 The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. ² "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

2. It is also clear here in Galatians 3: “the Scripture foresaw...”

Galatians 3:8 The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you."

3. God intended to save people from every nation on earth through this one nation... through the Jews... through Abraham
4. Paul personifies Scripture when he says “the Scripture FORESAW that God would justify the Gentiles by faith...”
- a. Actually, it was God who ordained it, and He put it in writing in the book of Genesis

- b. Also, notice that in verse 8, the text says the scripture announced THE GOSPEL in advance to Abraham... this is a powerful concept: the "gospel" is God's message of salvation to the human race, and despite the fact that Abraham lived 2000 years before Christ, this verse implies that there has only ever been one saving message to the human race

C. Genesis 15: The Starry Night Promise

1. After the defeat of the four kings in Genesis 14, Abraham refused to accept any plunder from the victorious King of Sodom... he didn't ever want that wicked man saying he'd made Abraham rich
2. Immediately after that, God appears to Abraham and makes him this promise:

Genesis 15:1 After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."

3. Abraham is troubled by this and wonders what God can give him since he has no son... no heir
4. Then comes the starry night promise and the statement Paul quotes:

Genesis 15:5-6 He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars-- if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." ⁶ Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

5. Then God makes him a second promise concerning the land:

Genesis 15:7 He also said to him, "I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it."

6. Abraham asks God:

Genesis 15:8 "O Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?"

7. God responds by the awesome covenant-cutting ceremony

Genesis 15:9 So the LORD said to him, "Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon."

Genesis 15:10 Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other

Genesis 15:12-16 As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. ¹³ Then the LORD said to him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. ¹⁴ But I will punish

the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. ¹⁵ *You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age.* ¹⁶ *In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here*

8. Then the firepot and the promise of the land:

Genesis 15:17-18 *When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces.* ¹⁸ *On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates*

9. So, to sum up: God promised Abraham: 1) many descendants; 2) the land

10. Abraham BELIEVED these promises, and God credited it to Abraham as RIGHTEOUSNESS

D. Genesis 17: The Sign of Circumcision and the Father of Many Nations

1. After this... many years after this, God gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision AND promised that he would be the father of many nations

ESV Genesis 17:4 *"Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations.*

2. Thus, Abraham an "Uncircumcised Gentile" When Justified

E. Romans 4 Makes this Plain

Romans 4:9-11 *Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness.* ¹⁰ *Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before!* ¹¹ *And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.*

F. True Jews Are of the Same Faith as Abraham... Not Mere Physical Descent

1. The Jews prided themselves in being physical descendants of Abraham
2. They felt that this meant two wrong things: 1) all Jews would be saved; 2) no one but Jews would be saved
3. The Judaizers were following these two faulty premises
4. But Jesus makes it plain that physical descent from Abraham does not mean anything spiritually

John 8:39 *"Abraham is our father," they answered. "If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would do the things Abraham did.*

5. Paul says the same thing:

Romans 2:28-29 A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. ²⁹ No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code

6. Abraham is the father of all who BELIEVE... both Jew and Gentile... whether they have been circumcised or not

Romans 4:11-12 So then, [Abraham] is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. ¹² And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

7. So Paul says this:

Galatians 3:7 Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham.

Galatians 3:9 So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

III. The Implication: You Can Be a Child of Abraham!

A. Amazing!! Every Single Person in this Room Can Be Counted as a Child of Abraham and Heir of the Promises Made to Abraham

1. Caucasian-Americans and African-Americans can become children of Abraham
2. Chinese people and Indian people can become children of Abraham
3. Men and women can become children of Abraham
4. Boys and girls can become children of Abraham
5. A wealthy German businessman can become a child of Abraham
6. A frail elderly woman in a nursing home can become a child of Abraham
7. A redneck Nazi skinhead shouting anti-Semitic threats can become a child of Abraham

ALL THAT IS REQUIRED IS NOT OBEDIENCE TO THE LAW... a Law that didn't even exist when Abraham was blessed by faith; no all that is required is that each person has to have the SAME FAITH AS ABRAHAM DID... faith in the promises of God

We can be children of Abraham and heirs of the promises made to Abraham

B. To Many People, This Is Worthy Only of a Yawn

1. They don't understand the STAGGERING NATURE of the promises to Abraham
2. The blessings are overwhelming:
 - a. Justification: complete forgiveness of all sins
 - b. Adoption: adopted into the family of God
 - c. Eternal life: living forever in God's family
 - d. God Himself as our reward forever
 - e. The Earth as an inheritance
 - f. A city built by God in which we will live forever

C. To Some People, This Is Shocking News

1. Jewish people might react with anger at this teaching, desiring to retain an exclusive claim to God as His chosen people
2. They can only consider the value of the physical lineage... of genetic descent
3. The Jews after the restoration from Babylon were HUGELY into genealogies, seeking to establish their lineage from Abraham
4. They can't believe that an uncircumcised Gentile could be considered as much a Jew as anyone who's ever lived

D. According to the Old Testament, Is This True?

1. Paul proves it from Scripture...
2. Genesis 12 makes it plain that God intended to bless all peoples on earth THROUGH ABRAHAM
3. Genesis 17 calls Abraham the FATHER OF A MULTITUDE OF NATIONS... a "multitude" is not just the Jews and Edomites and Ishmaelites etc. That's just a few nations... the Hebrew word translated "multitude" shows that God was extending this salvation to the ends of the earth!!

E. Condition of the Promise: Imitating the Faith of Abraham

Romans 4:12 *And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.*

Hebrews 11:8-10 *By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. ⁹ By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.*

Hebrews 11:17-19 *By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac; he who had received the promises was offering up his unique son, ¹⁸ about whom it had been said, In Isaac your seed will be called. ¹⁹ He considered God to be able even to raise someone from the dead, from which he also got him back as an illustration.*

F. Result of the Promise: Inheriting Abraham's Blessings

1. Abraham's reward

Genesis 15:1 *After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."*

Steve Green:

God and God alone will be the joy of our eternal home
He will be our one desire; our hearts will never tire of God and God alone

2. Abraham's inheritance

a. The earth

Romans 4:13 *It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.*

b. The New Jerusalem

Hebrews 11:10 *he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.*

Hebrews 11:16 *they were longing for a better country-- a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.*

IV. Negative Old Testament Proof: Curses from the Law

Galatians 3:10-14 *All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." ¹¹ Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith." ¹² The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them." ¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." ¹⁴ He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.*

A. Old Testament Also Speaks of Curses

1. All through this sermon, we have been speaking of the incredible blessings of being adopted into Abraham's family
2. But the Law speaks of curses... and it is the Law that brings curse
3. To RELY on obeying the Law live under a curse... because the Law cannot be kept perfectly... so WHY IN THE WORLD WOULD ANYONE want to exchange the freedom Christ purchased for us at the cross for a life under the curse of the Law??
4. Deuteronomy 28 lists blessing for COMPLETE OBEDIENCE... but also curses for DISOBEDIENCE

Deuteronomy 28:15-19 *However, if you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: ¹⁶ You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country. ¹⁷ Your basket and your kneading trough will be cursed. ¹⁸ The fruit of your womb will be cursed, and the crops of your land, and the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. ¹⁹ You will be cursed when you come in and cursed when you go out.*

5. But the ultimate curse of the Law is eternity in HELL:

Matthew 25:41 *"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.*

B. The Specific Curse Here: Failing to Obey Everything in the Law All the Time

Galatians 3:10 *All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."*

James 2:10 *For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.*

All the Law can do is accuse the sinner and condemn him or her

The Law brings a curse because we cannot perfectly obey ALL of its precepts

Thus Peter called it a crushing yoke that no one can bear:

Acts 15:10 Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear?

C. The Obvious Conclusion: Justification CANNOT Be By Law

1. Justification has to do with being seen to be completely righteous in God's sight
2. Once you violate the smallest precept of the Law, it can only curse you

Galatians 3:11 Clearly no one is justified before God by the law

D. Back to the Positive: The Righteous Shall Live by Faith

1. Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:2... a key principle drawn from the Old Testament on salvation

Galatians 3:11 Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith."

2. Faith is the principle that he is holding up in Abraham's life... it was by faith he was justified
3. Habakkuk 2:2 extends this to a universal principle... if you want to LIVE, you must BELIEVE... the righteous live by faith, not by Law

E. Two Ways to Live... Only One Leads to Life

1. It's Law vs. Gospel; It's Law vs. Grace
2. There are thus two ways to live... but only one leads to eternal life
3. Faith is a whole lifestyle based on the promises of God

Romans 4:12 walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

4. Hebrews 11 gives us a sense of that pattern of life
 - a. By faith, Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees and started a new life in the Promised Land
 - b. By faith, Abraham built altars and called on the name of the Lord

- c. By faith, Abraham lived on the promise that he would have descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky
 - d. By faith, Abraham lived in tents and refused to live in Sodom and Gomorrah
 - e. By faith, Abraham was enabled to become a father in his old age
 - f. By faith, Abraham obeyed God when He told him to sacrifice Isaac as a burnt offering
5. On the contrary, Law is not based on faith:

Galatians 3:12 The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them."

Reliance on the Law becomes a whole different way to live

Trusting in your own righteousness, walking according to your own patterns of obedience, living like a self-righteous, meticulous Pharisee OR simply believing that you're "basically a good person," and that "your good deeds outweigh your bad"

F. Christ Redeemed Us from the Curse of the Law

- 1. The Law only brings a curse because that's all it can do... it cannot commend you for obedience... it can only crush you for disobedience
- 2. As soon as we disobeyed, we came under the DEATH PENALTY of the Law... the curse of death—not just physical death, but eternal, spiritual death in hell
- 3. Christ redeemed us from that curse of the Law

Galatians 3:13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."

- 4. The cross = the tree; Paul finds Christ's death a fulfillment of this statement:

Deuteronomy 21:22-23 If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, ²³ you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse. You must not desecrate the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance.

- 5. Probably this idea was a massive stumbling block to Paul before he became a Christian... how could God's Anointed One be cursed like this?

6. The cross meant an exchange: all our wickedness and sin and rebellion and transgression put on Christ; God punished Him as though He'd sinned our sins

2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

- G. "Redeemed" = Bought with a price... Christ paid the price of His blood to redeem us from the curse of the Law

V. The Implication: You Can Be Blessed, Not Cursed!

Galatians 3:14 He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

- A. Verse 14 Says it All: God's Purpose was to Bless All Peoples Through Abraham... and Ultimately through Christ
1. Basically that verse says we are Abraham's HEIRS... all that was promised to him, we are now entitled to
 2. All that the Law threatened against us is now removed in Christ
- B. The Blessing Comes by Faith, Not by Law
- C. The Proof of the Blessing is the Gift of the Spirit

Ephesians 1:13-14 Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession-- to the praise of his glory.

VI. Applications

- A. Trust in Christ so you may be justified
- B. Learn the privileges of being a child of Abraham
- C. Learn to delight in the "music" of God's glory by faith:

Piper's Illustration:

Picture heaven as Orchestra Hall and the music of the symphony as the glory of God. Everybody here knows that faith is the precondition for entering that hall and enjoying that music. But some of you, 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.