

**Genesis 12:3**

***I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonours you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.***

**Genesis 15:1-6**

***After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.”<sup>2</sup> But Abram said, “O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?”<sup>3</sup> And Abram said, “Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.”<sup>4</sup> And behold, the word of the Lord came to him: “This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.”<sup>5</sup> And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”<sup>6</sup> And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.***

**Galatians 3:1-18**

***O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.<sup>2</sup> Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?<sup>3</sup> Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?<sup>4</sup> Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain?<sup>5</sup> 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—<sup>6</sup> just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”?<sup>7</sup> Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.<sup>8</sup> 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.”<sup>9</sup> So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.<sup>10</sup> 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.”<sup>11</sup> Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.”<sup>12</sup> But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.”<sup>13</sup> 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”—<sup>14</sup> so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup> For if the***



THE STORY OF  
*Everything*  
LUKE 24:27

***inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.***

Growing up in Niagara Region I was exposed at an early age to some of the tremendous tales of various Niagara Falls 'daredevils'. Certainly the most famous of these being the great French tight-rope walker Charles Blondin. In the summer 1859 he crossed the roiling river many times and in increasingly daring ways including backward, blindfolded, on stilts, pushing a wheelbarrow, and even carry his manager on his back. Blondin's instructions were clear: "Look up, Harry.... you are no longer Colcord, you are Blondin ...If I sway, sway with me. Do not attempt to do any balancing yourself. If you do we will both go to our death." It is one of the best examples of trust between humans. Can you imagine if halfway across Harry said, "Charles, thanks for the lift this far, but let me down; I've got it the rest of the way." That would have been foolish – and fatal!

In a way, this is what the apostle Paul is dealing with in our text today. Can we, and do we, trust God's promises? Can he get us to the other side? The text has two surprising elements: the strength of the rebuke and his appeal to Abraham, even going so far as to say the gospel was preached to him!

He writes to recent Christian converts in the Roman province of Galatia, roughly part of modern Turkey today. They had heard the message of Paul and believed it, that being his message of the gospel and the grace of Christ. Sadly, they have quickly turned and Paul expresses astonishment that they had so quickly turned, deserting him who called them. The language is very strong in the Greek: it implies they have switched sides and transferred their allegiance. He says to "a different gospel" though quickly adding "not that there is another". He goes on to give his testimony, assert his calling and apostleship, and states one of the fundamental truths of the gospel at the end of chapter 2 that we are saved (justified) by giving up on our moral efforts (works of the law) and trust instead the work of Christ. And the Galatians evidently believed that, but other teachers had come in the midst of them distorting the gospel message. Their appeal was something like this: "Hey it is great that you trust in Christ, but are you really in line to receive all the blessings of Abraham? Are you circumcising the men? Let me see your calendars – do you have the right holy days set aside? Obviously your eating kosher, right? You know, if you want to be a true sons of father Abraham you need to live as Jews.

This sets the stage for 3:1 and Paul's stinging rebuke: "O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?" In other words you are not thinking straight, it is like you are under a spell. In the Greek bewitched has the sense of someone giving you the evil eye, and thus the eyes of the Galatians have been captivated by the distortions of these false teachers. This is why he says in v2: "*It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.*" How had they seen Christ crucified? It is unlikely any of them had seen the actual event – Paul's preaching painted the vivid portrayal of the crucified Christ. He had placarded it, like putting it on a massive

Trusting God All the Way  
Genesis 12:3; 15:1-6; Galatians 3:1-18  
CBC Ilderton

Rev. G. S. Prickett  
14 March 2021



THE STORY OF  
*Everything*  
LUKE 24:27

billboard for all to see: “The crucified lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!” Notice the message is not how to live, but what Christ has done on the cross. This is what their eyes were to be upon. He continues and appeals to their experience asking rhetorical questions like how did they receive God’s Spirit, by works of the law or faith. And if God started your new life in him by the Spirit do you really believe he is going to finish it by your flesh? Paul lays out the alternatives clearly: the work to complete us is either in faith and Spirit, or law and flesh. In short verses 1-5 say that we not only are *saved* by the gospel, but we also *grow* by the gospel. We never outgrow the gospel.

And this is the real crux of the issue: how am I made acceptable to God (and ourselves and others). This is what the Galatians wanted. This was the enticement put before them by the false teachers, the promise of being a better Christian, the promise of fuller blessings. It is no different today. How so? We all aim for some sense of completion and we place our trust in various kinds of works and achievements: moral, relational, educational, jobs, etc. Paul says the gospel way to completion upends all of these efforts.

Paul then appeals to Abraham and I think this is brilliant. He is taking on these false teachers who want these new believers to live as Jews. Who is the father of all Jews – Abraham. And so he calls to the witness stand the false teachers star witness to help make his case. Why is Abraham so commended in the “hall of faith” of Hebrews 11? Why does Paul devote a chapter in Romans to him? And why in this letter, when defending the gospel, does he reach back through nearly 2000 years of biblical history to appeal to him? Because, simply, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.”

So Paul starts by appealing to their experience, now he turns to Abraham and the Scriptures. This is fascinating to me. Paul, more than any other NT author, teaches, explains, defends, and proclaims the gospel: the central event of which is of course the sacrificial atoning death of Christ. But here he turns to Abraham. Think about it, we are about as far in history from Paul and Jesus as they were from Abraham. And through this, we see the gospel as not just an event, but a promise. Paul goes back to one of God’s first promises, his promise to Abraham that we read of first in Genesis 12 (15&17). The cross is the centre of history, the fulfillment of all past and future hope. But Genesis 12 is very important turning point as well. The world is broken. The original sin of Genesis 3 has ushered in chaos. We see it in relationships in chapter 4, in the mounting corruption of society in 5 and 6 leading to the Flood, we see it in marred ambitions at Babel. What is the answer to the world’s brokenness? God gives a promise to a man named Abram. I want us to consider three reasons why Paul frames up the gospel as a promise.

**1) See the *purpose* of the gospel. (vv7-9)**

*“Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. <sup>8</sup> And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel*

Trusting God All the Way  
Genesis 12:3; 15:1-6; Galatians 3:1-18  
CBC Ilderton

Rev. G. S. Prickett  
14 March 2021



THE STORY OF  
*Everything*  
LUKE 24:27

*beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." <sup>9</sup> So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith."*

He answers the question of who are the true sons of Abraham. It is not about what family you are from, or your people group, but those who are of faith like Abraham. How is the gospel preached to Abraham; through God's promise that "In you shall all the nations be blessed" and that blessing is justification by faith. Paul says Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness. Note Abraham didn't believe because he was a righteous man. He believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness. This is God declaring him righteous, it implies a change in status: he is now considered something that he was not before, on account of his faith. Let's consider what Abraham believed. Please note Paul does not say, 'Abraham believed *in* God". Of course Abraham did believe in God, but this in itself is not justifying (saving) faith. What Abraham believed specifically is God's promise. Paul says this even more explicitly in Romans 4:21, Abraham was "*fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was counted to him as righteousness.*" His faith was in God, not his own performance. It is no different for us, there is a life and death difference between a general belief *in* God, and believing God's gospel promise to us. Look, the bible tells us even the devil believes *in* God. Many people have a sort of religious belief in God, but no sense of their need of God. This is why Paul stressed the crucifixion in his preaching. I know in my life this is what flipped the switch for me. As a teenager, I spent close to two years studying various religious ideas and themes. I believed in God. It wasn't until I comprehended the cross and its necessity and purpose that I had saving faith – that I trusted the promise of the gospel to justify me before God. This leads to the next thing to see.

## **2) Trust the *power* of the gospel (vv10-14)**

Paul says soberly in verse 10 that all who rely on the works of the law are doomed – they are under a curse. This doesn't imply that the law itself was a curse, on the contrary it was a blessing. But if you live "under it", that is if you say you say, 'I am accountable to the law of God', you are cursed. That is because if you are accountable to it, you are judged according to it, and required to obey every single bit of it. Guess what, your application for right standing with God is rejected. If you have ever had a computer virus you know how debilitating they are. They get into the inner core of your computer – its operating system and disables it from working properly – in a sense you can't get it to obey your commands. That computer is powerless to serve you until you rid the system of the virus. Sin is like this, we are infected with this deadly virus called sin and it taints all aspects of our life, and renders us incapable of living rightly before God. Paul reminds them of the power of the gospel. Christ redeems us from this curse by becoming a curse for us. He takes upon himself our penalty for our sin in dying his sacrificial death. That leaves us a choice: trust in our own impotent works and be cursed, or trust in the faithful works of Christ to receive the blessing of Abraham.

Trusting God All the Way  
Genesis 12:3; 15:1-6; Galatians 3:1-18  
CBC Ilderton

Rev. G. S. Prickett  
14 March 2021

### 3) Understand the *nature* of the gospel

Thirdly, Paul wants the Galatians to understand the nature of the gospel – its essence. I think this may be the key reason for framing his exhortation around the promise to Abraham. Have you ever tried explaining something to someone and they are dutifully nodding their head back at you? When you finish they say, something like, “I know what you mean, it is sort of like this isn’t it?” And their analogy proves they haven’t understood a word you said! This must be how Paul feels. He is astonished at their foolishness. “Do you really get this?” So he gives them an example: “*even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified.*” This means that the promise to Abraham is unaffected by Mosaic ceremonial law, which came 430 years after the promise to Abraham. God is faithful to his promises, always, and this one is no different. Moreover, understand the implications to your inheritance (the covenant blessings of God are often spoken of as an inheritance). If it comes by works of the law, then it is not by a promise, but it did come through Abraham as a promise. This speaks to the very nature of the gospel: it is a gift that comes by a promise. To the Ephesians he says we are saved by grace through faith; and not of our own doing, it is a gift of God. A gift-promise is not something you can earn, you simply receive it by faith. If your dad promises you the car next Friday, how do you get the keys? Believing your dad exists is not good enough. You must also believe that he will honour his promise. So, in faith, come Friday, you hold out your hands and receive the keys.

We are not only saved by the gospel, but we grow by the gospel. You are not likely clamouring to return to Jewish ceremonial law, but that doesn’t mean you are not subject to the same underlying problem. Do we really trust his promise? Are we trusting God to complete the work he began in us? In our statement of values we speak of the transforming nature of the gospel: it changes how we see God, how we see ourselves, and how we see others. Check yourself; if we really understand the nature of the gospel it humbles us before God and others. Is this kind of humility reflected in how we see ourselves and others? Are we trusting in the power of God to finish the work he started in us – or have we shifted to some kind of works? We are all tempted to move from relationship with God to rules. The gospel promise is about provision not performance! And really, is there a better example than Abraham. Abraham childless, wife barren, if the promise was to be fulfilled – it was only to be by God.

The old James Proctor hymn says it so well, appropriately titled: *It is Finished*.

*Lay your deadly doing down  
Down at Jesus’ feet.  
Stand in him, in him alone –  
Gloriously complete.*