

A FAMILY RESEMBLANCE – SONS OF ABRAHAM
Galatians 3:6-9

When we talk about someone having a family resemblance, we're saying that someone can be identified with a certain family or group of people simply by their outward features. By the way someone looks or talks or does certain things, you can tell who they came from or where they came from. There are certain genes your parents passed on to you – you might have their looks, their hair color, their eyes, the same body type, your voice might even sound similar or your smile might be the same. There's certain attributes or characteristics you have about you, mainly physically, that look a lot like your folks' or other people in your family. In fact in some cases, someone whom you've never met before can take one look at you and listen to the way you talk and say, "You're one of the "Johnson" boys aren't ya?" They can just tell. Whenever someone meets a newborn baby, what's the first thing they say? "Oh, they look just like their mother, or just like their father," or if they don't want to hurt either of the parents' feelings, they say, "Your baby is just a great mix of both of you," or something like that. There's a family resemblance there.

But what does family resemblance look like in the family of God? How can you tell by studying someone whether they belong to the family of God or not? Is it by the way they look? No. God made it clear in 1 Samuel 16:7 that He didn't look at the outside. When Samuel was surveying the crowd, looking to replace the tall, dark and handsome Saul as king over Israel, he assumed God would choose someone similar but, "the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature... for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." You can't tell who is in the family of God by what they look like. Our passage tells us today it's a spiritual family resemblance.

It's all about sonship, specifically being **sons of Abraham**. The idea of sonship, being sons of Abraham and thus, sons of God, is going to come up often throughout chapters 3 and 4 (3:7; 3:9; 3:29; 4:22, 28; 4:31). What does it mean to be a son of Abraham? The Abraham we're talking about is the man who lived 1,000's of years ago in Genesis times. His name is one of the first names mentioned in the Bible, as early as Genesis 11. He is considered the father of the Hebrew nation, the Israelites, the first Jew. God chose Him out of all the people in the world to be an instrument of His. It was to Abraham that God made the original promise that his descendants would inherit the land of Israel and the Messiah and blessings. **And since God chose Abraham, for anyone to be a descendant of his, was to be a considered a child of God or part of God's people and an heir of the promise.¹ And the way that you identified yourself in the Old Testament times with Abraham, according to God's words and the Law, was to be circumcised** (having the foreskin of the male reproductive organ removed). That was how the Hebrew people or even Gentile converts to Judaism were distinguished from the rest of the world. And what the false teachers in Galatia were saying to the churches there is that if you really want to be a child of God, you have to be circumcised according to the Law of Moses. It was one of those rites, those rituals, that had been around for the longest time and it was hard to break free from when the Church was born because it was so ingrained and so normative to the old Jewish way of worship and living life under the Law. But as we've discussed already, in our study of Galatians, circumcision isn't necessary to be saved – circumcision and uncircumcision are nothing? So how are the sons of God, the real sons of Abraham, characterized? What are the common features between Abraham and a true son or daughter of Abraham? What characteristics does a true child of God have? I have 2 big characteristics from our passage. The first is that...

I. TRUE SONS OF ABRAHAM ARE CHARACTERIZED BY FAITH. (VV. 6-7)

Paul had just dealt a severe blow to the Galatians in verses 3:1-5 by reminding them of their past experience with the Spirit of God. By asking five rhetorical questions, he just proved that they were

justified by faith in Christ because they received the Spirit of God when they believed. On top of that, they had experienced the sanctifying work of the Spirit of God in their lives when all they did was simply believe. And that experience of the Spirit was sufficient in and of itself to prove that they were justified by faith because no one is justified who doesn't have the Spirit and no one is not justified who has the Spirit. If you have the Spirit, you are justified – “if anyone doesn't have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him, (Rom. 8:9).” Upon believing, you have been baptized and sealed by the Holy Spirit of God who is given to the children of God as a deposit on eternity. He's like a down payment on eternity. That argument based on their experience was a devastating blow in this theological boxing match between Paul and the Judaizers; between grace vs. Law; between faith vs. works. “Did you receive the Spirit by works of the Law or by hearing with faith?” Obviously they received the Spirit of God and were justified by faith before these guys who want to cherry-pick parts of the Law to live under, even came around.

And now, you come to verse 6, and Paul delivers the knockout punch. [just like you are justified by faith] “Even so, Abraham believed God, and it was credited to Him as righteousness. Therefore, be sure [why does he say be sure? Because they weren't thinking. He called them foolish Galatians – unthinking Galatians – know that] it is those who are of faith who are the sons of Abraham.”

A. True sons of Abraham are sons by faith. (v. 7)

It's not those who are of the Law or are of circumcision, but those who are of faith. God justifies everyone by faith, just like Abraham! You have to remember, these false teaching Judaizer guys, who were teaching as though Christ wasn't enough to pay for sins and faith in Him wasn't sufficient – but were teaching you had to keep the Law as well, thought they were hot stuff – they really thought, like Paul once did, that they were serving God by teaching this. It's likely to have started as a Satanic influence but some really thought they were God's children because they kept the Law and were circumcised. **They followed Moses. They thought Moses and the Old Testament was on their side.**² So what does Paul do? He quotes Genesis 15:6, something Moses wrote (he wrote the Pentateuch, which would be the first five books of the Bible) and proves that **even Moses knew Abraham was justified by faith.** He was justified by faith **before he was circumcised.** He was justified by faith **before the Law was even given** by God. The Law actually wouldn't come for some 430 years later (3:17).

Genesis 15:6 was a commonly used verse for Paul. He uses it here and in Romans to prove that man is justified by faith. And it should be foundational for us to remember as well. It's one of those verses that just needs underscored because we tend to think of the Old Testament being a period where man was justified by works, but he wasn't. It's always been by faith. We looked at that a few weeks ago with the Old Testament sacrifices and how if they weren't offered with a repentant heart in faith, it was rejected by God. Abraham is like the first prototype for salvation by faith and living by faith because justification and living by faith was first clearly stated in Scripture with Abraham, so Paul often refers back to him. This faith thing is nothing new. It's been lost to works.

When we look at the context of Genesis 15:6, we see the word of the Lord coming to Abraham, who has already by faith, left his father's home in Mesopotamia (Iraq) and left his idolatrous country and journeyed west, not really knowing where he was going but led by God to the promised land of Canaan, where Israel is. And the Lord reminds him there that he doesn't need to fear, he is protected by God and his reward will be great. Abraham says, “Oh Lord God, what will you give me, since I'm [still] childless.” You have given me no offspring. Is the promise going to come through Eliezer of Damascus who was born in my house but not my posterity? And God says, “This man will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body shall be your

heir.’ And [God] took him outside and said, ‘Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.’ And He said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be.’ Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to Him as righteousness.” Abraham was justified for simply believing God – believing that God was able to carry out what He had just told him and would! This was no small thing for Abraham. It went against all reason! Abraham and Sarah were old and beyond the years of child bearing and not only that, but Sarah was known for being barren. She was known for not being able to have kids. And Romans 4 says he actually thought about that: “Without becoming weak in faith **he contemplated his own body**, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and **the deadness of Sarah’s womb**; yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform. Therefore it was also credited to him as righteousness. Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him, but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.”

Abraham was justified by faith, in order that it might be according to grace for everyone. **It’s always been by faith.** No one is ever justified for their works – works are never the basis of justification – only evidence of it. And everyone who has believed in Christ, put their faith in Christ, is a son of Abraham therefore, also a son of God.

B. To be a son of Abraham is to be a son of God. (v. 7)

There’s three ways for someone to be a son of Abraham the way Scripture uses it: **by blood, by blood + faith (saved Jew), by faith.** A lot of Jews thought they were automatically saved because they were literally blood descendants of Abraham, children of Abraham. But what Paul makes clear in Galatians is that **physical lineage and heritage doesn’t save you – faith does.** “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus,” (Gal. 3:26). **Faith, trust and believe in English all come from the same Greek word *pistis*** - And if you are not trusting Christ but are trusting something else, you are not a son of Abraham. John the Baptist called the Pharisees sons of snakes when they thought they were sons of Abraham. He actually told them God can raise up children of Abraham from stones! Paul calls unbelievers sons of disobedience. There’s an interesting dialogue about this idea of being a son of Abraham in John 8 between some Jews and Jesus. Jesus told some Jews, “If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine and the you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.’ They answered Him, ‘We are Abraham’s descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, ‘You will become free’?... Jesus says, ‘I know that you are Abraham’s descendants; yet you seek to kill Me, because My Word has no place in you... They answered and said, ‘Abraham is our father.’ Jesus said to them, ‘If you are Abraham’s children, do the deeds of Abraham. But as it is, you seek to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do. You are doing the deeds of your father....If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My Word. You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father... who is a liar and the father of lies... He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God.”

Look at the parallel Jesus stresses between being of God and being a son of Abraham. He also stresses that sons of Abraham hear and believe the Word of God. You can’t understand the things of God without being a true son of Abraham. If you’re a spiritual son of Abraham, you’ve been

born again and are able to take in the Words of God because the Spirit of God illuminates truth for you to understand it. And He says to not respond in faith to Him is to call God a liar, just like Satan. 1 John 5:9-10 says, “for the testimony of God is this, that He has testified concerning His Son. The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son.” To not believe in Christ or to work for salvation is to be a son of the devil and call God a liar. It’s just like Satan in the garden of Eden, saying, “Did God *really* say... not to eat of that tree?” You don’t believe Him. Faith, however, honors God by believing God’s Word. Faith says to God: “I believe what you say.”³ And He justifies you for that.

If you’re here today and you’re trusting in your own goodness or your works or your merits to get you to heaven – you’re trusting in your baptism, communion, tithing, church attendance or membership (if you ask a lot of people if they’re saved a lot of them reply with the fact that they’re part of some church denomination – not their faith in Christ). Everyone’s faith is in something. Faith always has an object and that only satisfactory object is Christ. And what a lot of religions do is they might say have faith in Christ, BUT also add to it. Catholicism is know for that. It’s called the “faith + religion”. It adds to Christ. It teaches **faith plus works, grace plus merit, Christ plus other mediators, Scripture plus tradition, the glory of God plus the glory of others like dead saints and Mary Queen of Heaven**. That’s why the reformation occurred and why the declaration of the reformation is that we are saved **by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, according to Scripture alone, for the glory of God alone**.⁴

I find it necessary to teach on the difference between the Bible teaches and what the Catholic Church teaches because they’re very evangelistic right now. **In that church, to preach man is justified only by faith in Christ is considered anathema. You are damned to hell for preaching that, but Scripture teaches the exact opposite. You’re damned for adding to Christ**. I shared an illustration about a month on how salvation in that church works but it wasn’t very clear because it wasn’t in my notes. It just came out. It was the bathtub illustration. But the illustration goes like this: **Imagine a bathtub** with a little red line around the top, and in order for you to be justified, you’ve got to get your water level up to that line. And when you get baptized, which is usually when you’re an infant, you put the plug in by doing that and the water starts to flow. And by works and attending mass and living a good life your level begins to go up. But if you commit a mortal sin, a bigger sin you willingly do, it’s a sin which pulls the plug. The plug comes out and all the water starts to drain out. And you have to start all over again. How do you start over? By doing penance. So you go to the confessional booth, you confess it to the priests he pronounces **absolution**(pardon) over you and then gives you an assignment called **satisfaction** and you must provide satisfaction for the sin which you’ve committed by whatever the priest tells you to do – I remember being told to pray a certain number of Hail Mary’s and attend mass. But as you do that, you put the plug back in and you begin to earn your merit again, filling it with water, trying to fill that tub. And if you die below that red line, which pretty everyone does, you get leftover sins burned off in purgatory first before you go to heaven and people on earth can hold masses for you, have them done in your name so that you get out faster and then you’re a saint.⁵

It’s all a system of works that voids the work of Christ as sole Redeemer and sole Mediator. It’s not biblical. Catholicism and every other religion in the world takes celebrations like baptism and requires them for salvation as the Judaizers did with circumcision. But like circumcision, baptism is an outward mark of salvation. It’s not the means of salvation. It’s a means of identifying as God’s

people.⁶ The Bible teaches we are saved by grace through faith in Christ and works are the fruit of salvation, not the root.

C. God considers those who believe as righteous. (v. 6)

If you're son of Abraham, you are characterized by faith and because of that, you are declared righteous. You have a righteousness that **is not your own** but is foreign to you.⁷ It's God's righteousness and it is perfect. Your sin has been imputed, placed upon Christ and His perfect righteousness has been imputed to you, placed upon you by God and you have been declared righteous. He took the punishment, the purgatory, you deserve and you have been given credit for something you didn't earn.

The second main characteristic of a true son of Abraham is that they are...

II. TRUE SONS OF ABRAHAM ARE CHARACTERIZED BY BLESSING (VV. 8-9)

"Those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer."

A. The believer has been blessed spiritually. (v. 9)

Because of our faith, we have been blessed by God – received divine favor from God. We've taken part in the spiritual blessing that were promised to Abraham's descendants so many years ago. Paul proves it to the Galatians from the authoritative Scriptures, going way back to the original Promise given to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3. "Now the Lord said to Abram, go forth from your country, and from your relatives, and from your father's house, to the LAND [land aspect] which I will show; And I will make you a great NATION [seed aspect], and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the nations of the earth of the earth will be BLESSED [blessing aspect]." The three main aspects of the covenant are land, seed and blessing. Later God develops these aspects even further into what we know as the Davidic, Palestinian [Land], and New [Blessing] Covenants.

- Davidic Covenant corresponding to the **Seed aspect**
Included and Eternal House, Throne, Kingdom (2 Sam. 7:1-16).
- Palestinian Covenant corresponding to the **Land aspect**
Unconditional ownership/conditional possession based on obedience (Gen. 15:18;17:8).
- New Covenant corresponding to the **Blessing aspect**
Mainly spiritual but land included referring to Mill. Kingdom (Jer. 31:31-34; Heb.8).

When you study these covenants, you'll notice God says, "I will" alot. God is saying it is up to Him alone, unconditionally, to keep these covenants, whereas with the Law was conditional, full of "If,... then," statements. But the part of it that we are concerned with today is the blessing aspect, the new covenant. Clearly the land of Israel or Palestine does not belong to us but to the physical descendants of Abraham and one of the greatest proofs of God's existence is that they are still in the land today. God still has a glorious future for the Hebrew people and the land (see Zech. 14). But as the Church, we partake of the blessings aspect that God had in mind all along in the Abrahamic Covenant which He affirmed in greater detail in Jeremiah 31:31-34 where God says, "I will put My Law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people... I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." We experience these spiritual blessings. Regeneration, forgiveness of sins and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.⁸

Look how in verse 3:14 how Paul connects our reception of the Spirit of God with the blessing aspect of the Abrahamic Promise. He says, "in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham came to

the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” So think about this: When God made the promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 so many years ago, He had you in mind! He had the gospel in mind! He had the Holy Spirit’s New Covenant ministry in mind.

This promise is so important to rightly understand the Word. It serves as the framework for the rest of Scripture, even the end times program. It’s one of those portions of Scripture that remind me of a good book or movie. They front-load certain characters and occurrences early on in the book that you gloss over without thinking about it, and then the closer you get to the end of the book, the more you realize just how significant that event or slightest detail was. The puzzle comes together a little bit and you want to go back a reread or rewatch it. And God did that in the Old Testament Covenants which ultimately find their fulfillment in Christ.⁹ That’s part of what makes reading the Bible fun! The more you study, the more you begin to connect the dots and the more you see the message of Christ from beginning to end working in harmony. It’s not just a random collection of ancient documents – it’s a masterpiece telling the most beautiful story in the world. The OT says Christ is coming, the Gospels say Christ is here, and the NT says Christ has come and is coming again!

As a result of the Promise and people being saved and the Church being built...

B. The nations are blessed as a result. (v. 8)

“All the nations will be blessed in you.” The nations are blessed by the gospel because the gospel is going out to every nation and people are being saved. And in a very tangible sense, the Church being salt and light in the world has a transformative effect on the nations of the world. Think of how much the gospel has effected the course of history or influenced the world like the settlement of the Americas. It’s in the history of the United States. The nations have indeed been blessed. I’ve seen someone ask the question before, “Why Abraham? It’s unfair. How come God only cares about the Jews and no one else (as if He just left the rest of the world hanging)?” That’s an ignorant question because it was through God’s choosing Abraham that He made Himself known to the world. His plan to reach the world was through Abraham. And it’s a beautiful plan. It’s a global plan. It’s a global gospel, a global commission, to be taken to the uttermost parts of the earth. Jesus said make disciples of all nations, all ethnicities. Bless every nation, as God desires.

III. CONCLUSION:

❖ **In God’s family, family resemblance is spiritual.**

We are justified and made part of that family by faith. God justifies us for our trust in Christ and declares us righteous for it. So first, if you haven’t put your trust in Christ, that’s primary. Do it today. Don’t leave here without doing that. Make your faith specific. Abraham didn’t just believe in God or a God. He believed God and God’s Word. A lot of people believe some things about God, but we need to make our beliefs precise. Don’t just put your faith in this idea of God you have in your mind or in the uncertainty of your works, wondering if you’ll ever be good enough. You can’t! Get rid of the distant, vague god so many have, and do what God specifically says in His Word and put your faith in the God-man, Jesus Christ, the personal God who came to earth to pay for our sins.

Secondly, don’t revert back to Law if you have put your faith in Christ. Remember that Abraham was justified by faith before the Law or circumcision was even a thing. Stand firm in simple faith. For your faith, God has considered you part of his family, a son of Abraham.

❖ **God’s family is a blessed, growing family.**

God has graciously adopted us as His children, forgiving us, regenerating us to the newness of spiritual life in Christ, and indwelling us by His Spirit. We can put to death the deeds of the flesh by walking in the Spirit and really know joy, love, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and self-control. How can we not want others to experience that same great salvation?! Paul said God preached the gospel to Abraham. So we too, should be seeking to share the gospel with others, even with the uttermost parts of the world. And what a wonderful passage of Scripture to be in on a day with our missionary friends visiting. They are giving up so much of their lives to live for the glory of God, taking the gospel that was proleptically preached even to Abraham, to Alaska, hoping to see the family of faith grow and flourish there. May we desire and pray about how we too, can be part of helping others to become the spiritual sons of Abraham and live by faith as Abraham did. We've been blessed, and now's our chance to be a blessing in this world.

¹ David A. DeSilva, *The Letter to the Galatians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 279.

² Warren W. Wiersbe, "Galatians," *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary, New Testament* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2007), 559.

³ Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians* (Lexington, KY: 2018), 68.

⁴ Shawn Rech, Brandon Kimber, *American Gospel: Faith Alone*, 2019 (documentary film).

⁵ Sandy Wilson, "Apostolic Confrontation: The Exclusive Sufficiency of Christ – session 2," 2017 No Other Gospel Reformation Conference, accessed 3/16/19.

⁶ John F. MacArthur, "Galatians," *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987), 73.

⁷ Wilson.

⁸ Paul Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2006), 77.

⁹ David Helm, *Expositional Preaching*, 9 Marks series (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2014), 80.