

Abraham's Blessing and the Holy Spirit  
Galatians 3

Turn to Galatians 3 please. Can we who are Gentiles inherit the blessing God promised Abraham and his descendants? How do we get it? How can we know that we have inherited this? Those are the questions that Paul's letter to the Galatian churches will answer for us.

We've been going through the Genesis stories, beginning with the God's blessing to Abraham. That blessing is the common thread that joins the different stories together. The Galatians churches in the NT had struggles and doubts about this very thing, inheriting the Abraham blessing, and the Letter was written to sort this out. We need to hear this too.

False Teaching in the Galatian Churches

Paul and Barnabas started the Galatian churches on their first missionary journey, Acts 13-14. There were few Jews in those churches, if any. As soon as the Galatians believed in Christ, the Holy Spirit began to work a variety of miracles in that church, which continued. It was clear that this happened only because they trusted in Christ. They had done nothing else.

But Jewish false teachers came in after Paul left. These Jewish false teachers believed that Jesus was the Christ, but they did not think that trusting in Christ was enough to get all God's blessings. They said these Gentile Christians would not inherit the blessing promised to Abraham unless they also kept the Law of Moses, particularly circumcision.

Paul was horrified at *any* teaching that trusting and following Christ was not enough. Faith in Christ brings *everything* God has to give, including the blessing to Abraham and his descendants. That's what Galatians 3 is about.

One Clear Evidence of the Holy Spirit – 1 Cor 12:3

Individual Galatian believers did not worry about whether or not they had the Spirit. If the Holy Spirit was working in their midst, then they assumed they all had the Spirit. They did not question this. They all had Christ, so they all had the Spirit, period. That's as it should be.

In Corinth they also had clear working of the Holy Spirit, but the way the Corinthians understood the gifts of the Spirit divided believers in "haves" and "have nots." This Corinthian teaching comes up now and then in our circles too. Corinthians teaching says some gifts of the Spirit show the fullness of the Spirit, and others do not. That was in Corinth, and sometimes around us.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul clears up who has the Spirit and who does not: *No one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit.* (repeat). Let's expand that to make clear what that means: *"Jesus is Lord" means "Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth, and he has full rights to my life."*

The only way any person can say that and mean it is if the Holy Spirit has done a great work in their mind and soul. It is that simple. Many people cannot say that and mean it, and many can.

This is how we know that we have the Holy Spirit. No one can say and mean "Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth, and he has full rights to my life," without the Holy Spirit working freely. That's the one big work of the Holy Spirit. All the rest is only adjustments.

### How Did You Receive the Spirit? – Gal 3:2, 5

*I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? ... So again I ask, does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?*

There is a story in Acts where Peter was explaining Christ to some Gentiles, and the people were believing in Christ as he spoke, and while he spoke they began to prophecy and speak in tongues! That did not always happen, but it did sometimes, and something like that happened when Paul taught about Jesus's death and resurrection in Galatia.

For the Galatian believers, the answer to this is easy. They received the Spirit by believing what they heard about Christ, long before they ever heard one word about the Law of Moses. And Paul knows this is so, because he was there, he saw what the Spirit did.

The important word here is *faith*. They *believed* the message from God about Christ, they put their *faith* in God's message, that's all, and in response God poured out his Spirit on them. Let's hold on to that. How did they receive the Spirit? They *trusted* what they heard about Christ.

### Abraham also Believed God's Message, so You are his Real Descendants – Gal 3:6-9

*So also Abraham "believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. 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." So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.*

Let's paraphrase this: You Galatians believed God's message, and God gave you a great gift, he sent you his Spirit. Abraham also believed God's message to him, and God gave him a great gift: God labeled Abraham a righteous man. We here and the Galatians did the same thing as Abraham. We put our faith in God's message to us. So we are his true descendants, and in that way get the blessing for him and his offspring. Now to v14: how do we know this is true?

Gal 3:14 *Christ 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.*

The key idea is this: Christ brought Abraham's blessing to Gentiles who believe, *so that* by faith we Gentiles would receive the promised Holy Spirit. The *result* of receiving Abraham's blessing is that we receive the Holy Spirit.

Can you feel what's going on here? The hot commodity in the Galatian churches has become the blessing to Abraham and his descendants. The false teachers have told them they don't have this, and they are distressed, they don't know what it is, this blessing to Abraham and his descendants, but they want it, and are ready to obey Moses and be circumcised in order to inherit this blessing.

And Paul is pulling out his hair. "You dopes! You fools! You have trusted in Christ, and you have received the Holy Spirit, so you obviously have inherited everything God offers! The very best thing God has to give anyone is the Holy Spirit, and you certainly have the Spirit, and you got it by trusting God's message about Christ. You have clearly inherited the blessing to Abraham, if you have the Spirit. Why are you listening to this terrible teaching!"

The Galatians know they have the Spirit. But the false teachers told them they did not have the Abraham blessing. Paul says, "that's ridiculous. If you did not have Abraham's blessing, you would not have received the Holy Spirit!"

And remember the unmistakable evidence of the Spirit. No one can say, "Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth, and he has full rights to my life," without the Spirit being active in them.

We asked three questions at the start. First, can we who are Gentiles inherit the blessing God promised Abraham and his descendants? The answer to this is yes, certainly. Second, How do we get it? We get it by faith, faith in Christ.

Third, How can we know that we have inherited this? Simple: the presence of the Holy Spirit. Receiving the promised Spirit proves that we have inherited the blessing to Abraham and his descendants. And in fact, the Spirit may well be what the blessing to Abraham actually is.

The second question was "how do we get this blessing?" The short answer is "faith," but at the end of Gal 3 Paul shows us more clearly how faith works.

#### How Does Faith Bring us Abraham's Blessing? – Gal 3:26-29

Like this: Christ is the ultimate offspring of Abraham, and the very Son of God. Our faith joins us to Christ, faith and baptism binds us to Christ and him to us. We get the blessing in Christ.

*So you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.* "Faith" for Paul includes "baptism," as is common in the New Testament. Faith makes us children of God, because in baptism we were clothed with Christ, God's one and only Son.

Christ Jesus is God's one and only Son, and also the most important of Abraham's descendants. By our faith and baptism, we were transplanted into Christ so that we're like parts of the same body. We are bound to Christ, we are clothed with Christ, we are grafted into Christ.

So if he's the Son of God, we're all children of God, male or female. If he's Abraham's offspring, we who trust him are Abraham's offspring, because we're bound to Christ, clothed with Christ, grafted onto Christ, transplanted into Christ. That's how faith brings us the blessing promised to Abraham.

There is a basic truth underneath all this that I want to make sure you get. *Trusting the good news about Christ brings us everything God has to give.* Here's the gospel: "Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, he was buried, he rose the third day, according to the Scriptures, and he appeared to many of followers at different times." That's the gospel story.

Those who believe this and put their trust in this Christ *have everything that God has to give.* Paul does not think circumcision is a terrible thing. He had Timothy circumcised so he'd get along with Jews. Paul does not think the Law of Moses is a terrible thing. He uses it frequently when he teaches Gentile churches.

What's horrible about this false teaching is that faith in Christ and being joined to Christ is not enough, it only gets us a part of what God has for us, and we have to do more to get the rest of God's blessing. For Paul, that was as evil a corruption of the gospel as their could be. All God's promises are "yes" in Christ, all of them.

In 2 Corinthians 1 he says it this way: "No matter how many promises God has made, they are all 'Yes' in Christ." And people, this kind of false teaching is still around. I have had students who had been taught that if we want the blessings of OT people, we have to obey the OT laws. And the teachers use the Scripture. These students were shaken, distressed.

And I've heard such teaching in other matters than OT blessings. Ways to manage God, to get more from him than he gave us when all we did was put our trust in his Son. Don't just doubt such teaching, flee from it. It always sounds Christian, and it's always evil.

Basic faith in Christ brings us all God's promised blessing. It is all there. All God's promises are "yes" in Christ. And the Bible says the proof is that the Holy Spirit. God's Holy Spirit is the best thing he could give anyone. And he has given us his Spirit. So obviously we've gotten it all.

You can say, "Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth, and he has full rights to my life," you know this in your mind and soul, and you *want* Jesus to be Lord and have full rights to your life. That only happens to people who have the Holy Spirit. That is the one and only way people get to that.

Let's read 3:26-29 again: *You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor*

*Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, (because Christ is Abraham's seed) and you are heirs according to the promise.*

And again, the Bible uses the Spirit as evidence for this. *Because you all, male or female, have been adopted as sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out "Abba, Papa, Dad, Father" (Gal 4:6). Romans 8 puts it this way: The Spirit we received brings about our adoption sonship, whether we're male or female. And by the Spirit, we cry out, Abba, Papa, Dad, Father. The Spirit himself tells our spirit that we are God's children.*

You see, the Galatians were worried that they were not Abraham's descendants, so they would not get the Abraham blessing. So Paul settles that for them, the fact that you have the Spirit proves that you have received the blessing to Abraham and his descendants.

But that stops too soon. In Christ, we are not just Abraham's descendants, we are GOD'S descendants. Believers have two fathers, an earthly father, and a heavenly Father, who is God Almighty. But for Jesus, who was born of a virgin, there was only one. Almighty God was also his earthly Father. So he could call God "Papa" or "Dad" in a way we cannot, because we just use that for our earthly father.

But we who believed in Christ are joined to him, clothed with him, bound to him, transplanted into Christ and grafted onto Christ. So if *Christ* can call God, "Abba, Papa, Dad," so can *we*! And the Holy Spirit tells our spirits that this is true, that we can speak to God like that. The work of the Holy Spirit is our evidence that we are truly God's children.

### The Three Questions

1. Can we who are Gentiles inherit the blessing God promised Abraham and his descendants? Yes, we can, no doubt about that.

2. How do we get it? The short answer is faith, trusting in the good news about Christ. The longer answer is that faith and baptism join us to Christ, we are clothed with Christ, bound to him, grafted onto him, transplanted into him. That's what faith and baptism do. Christ is the Son of God and the greatest of Abraham's descendants, so we are included because of him.

3. How can we know that we have inherited this? We know because God has given us the Holy Spirit. The faith that brings the blessing of Abraham also brings the Spirit of God. We know that we have the Spirit of God, so we know that we have the blessing of Abraham, and we got it by believing the message we heard about Christ Jesus.

4. What is the blessing to Abraham and his descendants? Paul never says this in so many words, but it appears to be the Spirit himself. If it's not the Spirit, there's no hint in Galatians what the Abraham blessing is. As near as we can tell, the Holy Spirit is the Abraham blessing. Amen.

PRAYER: Our Father in heaven, our Dad in heaven, we have seen in Genesis how determined you were to bless your people, how eager you were to be with them, and take care of them and see them through their troubles. And this is more of the same. So, thank you that our simple faith in Christ brings us every blessing you can give. Thank you for your Holy Spirit, who is the greatest treasure you could give us. Thank you for giving us the Abraham blessing. Thank you for these encouraging Scriptures to show us these things.

And Father, there was a warning for us here. You have made many promises, and they are all "Yes" in Christ. If we have Christ, we have them all. So, don't let us doubt or waver on that. Life can be hard and discouraging, and we can be fooled at those times into believing that you are holding out on us. Thank you for the Holy Spirit, the greatest gift, who proves we are your adopted heirs. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage our hearts and strengthen us in every good deed and word. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.