

Galatians 3: 5-7; “By the Hearing of Faith”, Message # 14 in the series – “Christ Has Made Us Free”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on September 20th, 2020, in the Afternoon Worship Service.

This phrase, “by the hearing of faith”, which is mentioned at the end of verse 5, is also mentioned in verse 2 where it says, “This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” So it must be a very important phrase for every Christian to understand if it is mentioned twice in so few verses. It is by the hearing of faith that we as believers were converted to Christ. It is true that we heard about the importance of faith in Christ when we first had the gospel preached to us. We heard that it was necessary to look outside of ourselves to Christ for salvation from sin in order to be righteous in God’s sight. But in the context here, it means more than this. In the context, “the hearing of faith” becomes the means whereby we receive everything God would give to us; things of truth and grace.

In verse 2, the apostle Paul words it in terms of their past experience at the time of their conversion: “Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” Here in verse 5, he words it in terms of the ongoing work of God in supplying to them the Spirit, so that they will grow in relation to their salvation: “Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you,” He does so by “the hearing of faith”; not simply hearing about faith, but “the hearing of faith”. So this is the proposition I would set before you at this hour: To be able to spiritually hear is the basis of all that you will receive, and all that you will do, in living the Christian life. Three observations in relation to this: 1st – The hearing of faith is a work of the Holy Spirit of God in your heart and mind. 2nd – The hearing of faith is beautifully exemplified in Abraham’s being justified. And 3rd – Only those who know the reality of the hearing of faith are “sons of Abraham”.

1st – The Hearing of Faith is a work of the Holy Spirit in your heart and mind.

(verse 5)

“Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” Notice that God the Father and Jesus Christ our Lord are the persons of the Divine trinity who supply the Spirit to the believer. The first two Persons of the Divine Trinity send the third Person, the Holy Spirit into the heart of the believer in Christ after they have believed in the gospel. Ephesians 1: 13 – “In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.” The believers in the Galatian churches had experienced this working of the Holy Spirit, His gracious influences working in their hearts the grace of regeneration, and the subsequent giving of the Holy Spirit to them to dwell in them forever.

They received all of this, God the Holy Spirit’s presence and influence, and His working in their hearts and minds, it says here, by the hearing of faith. It was nothing that they did, except their believing in the truth of the gospel. That was what brought the Holy Spirit to them. And, it was certainly not the works of the law, whether moral or ceremonial, that brought the Spirit to them. They had been supplied with the Spirit, by the hearing of faith. The phrase, “works miracles among you” does not appear to refer simply to the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit, or to the miracles done by the apostles to confirm the gospel and the word of God preached to them. In the Greek, the word which is translated “among” you is thought by many commentators to better be translated “in you”, or at least to include the thought of God’s working in them as well as among them by their having received miraculous gifts. (Lightfoot, Gill, Burkitt)

But let us look at a couple of verses which use this word “supplies” in relation to the Spirit’s working and this will become clearer. The Pulpit Commentary says that the word in the Greek -

The compound verb ἐπιχορηγεῖν, differs probably from the simple form χορηγεῖν only by indicating profusion in the supply; but this qualification of its meaning is too slight to be representable in translation. In other words, the churches of Galatia had been profusely supplied by the Holy Spirit with both gifts and graces. Let's look at gifts of the Spirit first. Turn with me over to 1st Peter 4: 10 and 11. "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." "If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God." "If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever." "Amen."

Notice that the grace of God, in true believers, is manifold as it relates to their gifts. The ability and strength to minister that gift is something that God is supplying. And in His supplying it, He supplies it so that you might minister on His behalf, and to His glory. He does not want any believer to minister in a legal way. And so he most definitely would not teaching Christians that if they are to know and to serve God, they should do this according to a man-made set of religious rules; their having participated in certain religious ordinances. He certainly would not teach them that they are meriting favor with God because of that, or that they will be going to heaven because they engage in good works. This is simply would not be true. But this was what the false teachers were trying to teach the churches of Galatia. And so, you see here that Peter is saying that if you would be faithful to God you will minister the truth of the gospel and the word of God according to instructions that he and the other apostles would give in the letters of the New Testament.

In other words, you will serve the Lord by the ability and strength and wisdom which God supplies. You believed in the gospel with the hearing of faith, and now you are serving God by the Spirit's power; by the strength which He supplies. Look also at Philippians 1, verse 15 – "Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel." "What then?" "Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice." "For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." Now, here we find something quite interesting. There were some men preaching Christ from selfish ambition, who were envious of Paul's gifts and his usefulness in the ministry; people who Paul could not approve of their motives, even though he could rejoice in their preaching of Christ.

This could have been a great discouragement to him, seeing as they intended to add to Paul's afflictions while in prison. But Paul did not let this get him down. Instead, he believed that the Lord would come and work providentially to order things for his deliverance through the prayers of the Philippian believers, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. You can see if Paul had been a law preacher, or a man motivated by fleshly impulses in his preaching, he never would have been able to have had this calm assurance and peace in the midst of his trials. It was because of the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ that he was encouraged and sustained in his time in prison. This same kind of grace is yours dear believer if you will awaken to the kind of power and love that Christ exercises toward you based upon the hearing of faith. When you read the promises of God and Christ in the Bible, they are there for you to live by; not to ignore them, or to doubt them. Remember, the hearing of faith brings grace and power to you, as the truth comes to your mind and heart. This is so that you really will be strengthened spiritually by it, and make progress in doing God's will in all the many situations of your life.

2nd – The hearing of faith is beautifully exemplified in Abraham's justification.

(verse 6 and 7)

"Just as Abraham believed God, and was accounted to him for righteousness." "Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham." The words, "just as Abraham believed God", show us that the hearing of faith was all that Abraham needed to be justified in the sight of

God. His faith was accounted to him for righteousness. But God was at work in Abraham's heart, at that time back in Genesis 15. God was creating faith in him. He was opening his spiritual ears to hear His blessed word to him, long before He was justified. This hearing of faith was going on in Abraham from the time of his initial call, back there in Ur of Chaldees. It was his hearing by faith that kept him from trying to justify himself in the sight of God by his thinking that any of his own works would merit favor with God. God gave Abraham grace to hear and receive the word which He spoke to him from time to time; grace which enabled him to do what God wanted him to do, and to believe in what God was promising him, even though he could not see how it would be fulfilled.

We need to see, that by the hearing of faith, God made an entrance into Abraham's heart and mind, so that the precious promises of His word would take root in his heart. It is the same with all true believers. For Abraham is the spiritual father of us all, both Jew and Gentile. Turn back with me to Genesis 15, verse 1. "After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Abram.' "I am your shield, your exceeding great reward." "But Abram said, 'Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" "Then Abram said, 'Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed, one born in my house is my heir!" "And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir." "Then He brought him outside and said, 'Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." "And He said to him, 'So shall your descendants be." "And he believed the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness."

Now, let us understand that God had spoken to Abraham before this time, and had given him promises, back in Genesis 12, verses 1-3, when he was still in Ur of the Chaldeans. There, he had said to him: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you." "I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing." "I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." Abraham departed from Ur as the Lord told him. Now turn over to Hebrews 11: 8 – "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go to the place which he would receive as an inheritance." "And he went out, not knowing where he was going." So Abraham had saving faith even when he left Ur of the Chaldeans.

But we hear nothing of this faith being accounted to him as righteousness until Genesis 15: 6, when God took him outside and told him to count the stars if he could. So would his descendants be. You see Abraham might have thought that he was being justified by his obeying God and going to the promised land. But he was not. It was only when he trusted God in relation to His being able to give him so many physical descendants; a thing which was impossible to him, knowing that his wife Sarai was barren. Then it was that the Scriptures say, "And he believed in the Lord, and He (that is God) accounted it to him for righteousness." Abraham trusted in God's promise to do something that he could not possibly do or bring about himself; that is to have children as many as the stars of the heavens. So it is with the hearing of faith, in each and every person who becomes a true Christian. Only those who are of this kind of faith are sons of Abraham.

This incident in Genesis 15: 1-6, the giving to Abraham this promise, took place years before he received the rite of circumcision, and thus became the first Hebrew; the first Jewish man. Abraham was still a Gentile when he believed God and was justified. So why should the people in the Galatian churches believe that they had to be circumcised and keep the ceremonial law, and add to it their moral and good works? This was not at all the basis of their salvation. The basis of their salvation would be what Christ had done for them in His righteous life and His sacrificial death. It had nothing to do with their works. It was all of God's doing, and His showing them grace through His promise, and His giving them grace through the New Birth by the Spirit's working.

Now, turn with me over to John 8, verse 31-40. “Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed in Him, ‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.’ “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” “They answered Him, ‘We are Abrahams’s descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone.’ “How can you say, ‘You will be made free?’” “Jesus answered them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.’ “And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever.” “Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.” “I know that you are Abraham’s descendants, but you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you.” “I speak what I have seen with My Father, and you do what you have seen with your father.” “They answered and said to Him, ‘Abraham is our father.’” “Jesus said to them, ‘If you were Abraham’s children you would do the works of Abraham.’ “But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God.” “Abraham did not do this.”

You can see from this although Abraham’s works had nothing to do with his being justified that they did show forth the reality of the grace which God had supplied him with. It was faith that justified Abraham. And it was faith that worked together with his works that proved that this faith was genuine. These people whom Jesus was speaking to said that they believed, and yet by the end of the conversation they were trying to kill him. Here is the deception. It is that some people go to church and observe the ordinances such as baptism, and yet God’s word has no place in them. Jesus had told them that the person who commits sin is the slave of sin and the slave does not remain in the house forever. Only He the Son could set them free. They did not think that they were sinners. They thought that they were saved because they were descendants of Abraham. But they were not because they would not receive God’s word or abide in it.

The hearing of faith puts faith and works in their proper order. And the people who heed it be set free from false conceptions of Christianity. There were many that Jesus was talking to, who thought that they were justified by their going to synagogue and doing their religious good works, but they did not believe that they needed to be saved from their sins by the hearing of faith. They needed to do good works, but not in order that they might be justified by them. James Chapter 2, verses 20-24. “But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?” “Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?” “Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?” “And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” “And he was called the friend of God.” “You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.”

This passage appears to contradict everything that we find in the book of Galatians, but it does not if we understand one thing; that is, the hearing of faith. In Galatians Paul is speaking about a person’s hearing that their own works will not being able to justify them, and they come to believe in the Lord’s promise of His freely bestowing the gift of salvation upon an unworthy sinner which they know themselves to be. Those works before conversion are called “dead works” in Hebrews 6: 1. Here, Paul is speaking about good works which follow conversion. Those works prove the reality of the hearing of faith. For the obedience that flows forth from that hearing, and having regard for God’s word, declares that that person is someone who has really been changed by God’s grace. Both Paul and James use the same verse, Genesis 15: 6 to prove their points. It took the hearing of faith for Abraham to leave Ur of the Chaldeans. It took the hearing of faith for Abraham to believe that he would really have children. And it took the hearing of faith for him to obey the command to offer up his son Isaac on the altar. The hearing of faith is all of God’s grace. It does not come by the works of the law, but it leads on to good works following conversion to Christ.