

Believing God – Accounted for Righteousness  
*Galatians 3:6-9*

*With Study Questions*

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*Galatians 3:6-9*

## **Review**

### **Chapter One**

Paul spent a great deal of time establishing that his office as an apostle was neither from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ (1:1). He was marveling that these churches in Galatia were so quickly turning away from the true gospel to a false gospel or a perversion of the gospel (1:6, 7). Those who deliver a false gospel, no matter how beautiful their speech, or awesome in appearance or authority, are to be accursed (1:8, 9).

We are not to be overly concerned with impressive people but with God's message. The word of God must stand above all (1:10). It was not Paul himself but the message that he preached that brought glory to God (1:23, 24).

### **Chapter Two**

Although Paul was not dependent upon the other apostles, his message was perfectly consistent with the other apostles (2:1-10). Showing all the more that the church is not to be built on human personalities, Paul writes how he confronted Peter. Peter was an apostle, but he was also merely a man and susceptible to the temptations of any other man.

Starting in chapter 2, verse 16, Paul brings to the forefront his main theses in this epistle—justification by faith. A man can never be acquitted or deemed innocent in the sight of God through human effort but by faith alone. Through the works of the law no man will be justified.

It is utter folly to think a mere man can parade his works before a Holy God who would then view those works as meriting salvation. Paul, by the grace of God, had a realistic view of the law and therefore died to the law. Paul, in viewing the law of God realized he could never keep that standard. The law, therefore, killed him that he might be alive in Christ—a righteousness that was not his own (2:17-21).

### **Chapter Three, Verses 1 through 5**

In chapter three Paul chides the Galatians for allowing themselves to be bewitched (the accepting of a lie). They were bewitched into thinking they could somehow supplement the work of Christ on the cross. In the same way we needed the work of the cross, fully and completely, to save us the hour we first believed, we need the cross to sustain us. It has always been and will always be the work of Christ on the cross which justifies us; we can add nothing to that.

Paul will now begin to explain how those who were seeking to obey the old covenant laws as a means to salvation were missing the point of their own religion. True Judaism never asserted that one could be saved through human effort; it was always by faith in Christ. Paul appeals to the father of Judaism, Abraham.

**...just as Abraham “believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”<sup>7</sup> Therefore know that *only* those who are of faith are sons of Abraham.<sup>8</sup> And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, “In you all the nations shall be blessed.”<sup>9</sup> So then those who *are* of faith are blessed with believing Abraham (Galatians 3:6-9).**

The imputed righteousness of Christ in both the old and new covenants is a result of faith. Some questions we might ask are:

- How were people in the Old Testament saved?
- What does it mean that Abraham believed *God* and it was accounted to him for righteousness – isn’t it necessary to believe in Jesus?
- What does it mean that belief was *accounted* to Abraham for righteousness?
- What does it mean to be a son of Abraham? Did father Abraham have many sons? Are you one of them? Am I?
- How does one become a son of Abraham? What does it yield?

What we will learn in these verses is that people in the Old Testament were saved the same way as people in the New Testament. From Adam until the very last person living who will ever live – salvation comes by faith.

Abraham’s faith in God was essentially Christianity, that is, belief in Jesus – God’s promise of redemption through the seed (God the Son). Jesus taught, **“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw *it* and was glad” (John 8:56)**. He may have seen it from afar (Hebrews 11:13) but he saw it nonetheless. Abraham did believe in Jesus.

It was through faith in God that Abraham was accounted as righteous. Accounted is the same root word as imputed which means to credit to one’s account. So when we have genuine (God-given) faith in God, God freely gives us the righteousness of Christ. **“For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21).**

To be a son of Abraham means to exercise the same kind of faith Abraham exercised. Physical descendants of Abraham apart from faith in Christ have no special standing with God. As Jesus said,

**I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not (Revelation 2:9).**

**Indeed I will make *those* of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not (Revelation 3:9).**

One becomes a genuine son of Abraham by faith in Christ. Paul, later in the chapter will teach us,

**And if you *are* Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:27).**

Let us now look at these verses individually.

### **Starting with Faith**

***...just as Abraham "believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."***

In Romans 14:23 we learn that "**whatever is not from faith is sin.**" There is nothing we can do to please God which does not flow from faith. Faith is the initial (God-given) action from which all approval flows and apart from faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). All of Abraham's obedience, if it hadn't been preceded by faith, would have been utterly unacceptable to God.

Of course we realize this when we comment that Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac was a great act of faith. And although it may not have been that act of faith which justified Abraham; certainly all subsequent acts of Abraham's faith were contingent upon his initial act of faith or belief.

### **A False Fireman**

An illustration, which will fall short in a great many ways, might be someone who has decided they want to be a fireman. They buy fireman's gear and show up at fires and throw dirt on them and help hold the hose and keep the spectators back. The other firemen don't know him because he is not actually on staff with the fire department. When payday comes he decides to stand in line to receive his due. But the man handing out the paychecks says, "I don't know you." All the works he did – even though they may have been helpful (although since he wasn't really a fireman he may have just been in the way) – did not yield any payment whatsoever. He could try to put fires out until the day he dies but apart from actually being hired he will never receive pay.

## **Insulting the Father and the Son**

A person can seek to do all the good things they possibly can. But if they are not doing these things because of faith in Christ, these good things are actually an insult to God and Christ.

They are an insult to God because the person is so drastically underestimating their own sin and God's holiness. Winning God's approval with human effort is like trying to buy a Ferrari with slug. The slug isn't even money and if it were money it wouldn't be enough.

They are an insult to Christ because the person is ignoring and despising the debt paid by Christ on the cross. I remember in college a girl complaining because of the lack of support she was receiving from her parents. She said, "They pay my rent and for my food and that's it!" Some of the older people in the class looked at her as if she just didn't get it. It takes a while sometimes for children to begin to recognize what their parents have done for them. As Christians we should grow into a greater understanding of what Christ has done for us. Of course this illustration falls short as well, for one might hypothetically argue that a child may, somehow, be able to support himself or pay the parent back (though this is quite unlikely considering all the parent does). But the price paid by Christ was a price no man could begin to pay.

Our works, thoughts, words, deeds, and very lives are only acceptable to God because of faith in Christ. Apart from this first act, men are left hopelessly in their sins. And all their efforts will ultimately be assigned to the ash can of eternity.

## **Imputed Righteousness**

As stated earlier, when God grants a person faith, He, through the instrument of that faith, imputes the righteousness of Christ. All of Christ's righteousness ends up in our account through no merit of our own. We have been freely given the gift of eternal riches and glory. This is the good news of the gospel.

### **Therefore know that *only* those who are of faith are sons of Abraham (Galatians 3:7)**

Without understanding that context of the letter, one cannot appreciate Paul's sassiness in these words. Let us remember that there were "so-called" Jewish Christians (Judaizers) in these churches who were telling the gentile Christians that they needed to be circumcised (become Jews) in order to be pleasing to God.

Paul has been, and will continue, arguing against adding any human behavior to the work of Christ on the cross. But Paul goes further here. He is informing these Judaizers, who would have taken great pride in their being descendants of Abraham, that they are not sons of Abraham at all. Only those who have faith in Christ are true sons of Abraham.

It is interesting that in the modern system of Dispensationalism the distinction made by the Judaizers is still present. There are special promises (perhaps not of justification but of political protection, land, etc) for those who are physical descendents of Abraham by virtue of their blood-line alone.<sup>1</sup> Paul will allow no such distinction. To lay claim to the promises given to Abraham, one must imitate the faith of Abraham.

**And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed"(Galatians 3:8).**

The Scripture "foreseeing" and "preaching" are interesting phrases. The Scriptures are equated with God Himself. When the Scriptures foresee it means that God foresees – when the Scriptures preach it means that God preached. So what was preached?

The gospel was preached to Abraham. In Hebrews 4:2 we read that the gospel was preached to the Israelites in the wilderness as well. And what is the gospel? The context of these words is the gospel in an eschatological sense – the blessings of Christ would extend to all the nations or families on earth – not merely Israel.

Paul's point here is that the gospel was never designed merely to be a gift to a specific ethnic group. Jesus would be born through this nation but once Jesus was born, this nation would become like any other nation – a nation in need of evangelism and faith in Christ.

The beauty of a passage like this is how it opens the entire Old Testament to all who have faith in Christ. We can view verses like Jeremiah 29:11 "**For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope**" as having significance for the church. William Hendriksen states this nicely,

**The passage (Gal. 3:6-9; cf. verses 14, 26-29) clearly teaches the important truth – by many so deplorably rejected – that the church of both dispensations, the old and the new, is *one*. All believers dwell in the same tent (Isa. 54:1-3). When the old dispensation ended it was not necessary to pitch a new tent; the old one was simply enlarged. All of God's children are represented by the same olive tree. The old tree did not have to be uprooted; new branches were grafted in among the old (Rom. 11:17)...All are saved by the same faith in the same Savior...The names of all God's people are written in the same book of life. There are not two of those books: one for the old and one for the new dispensation; there is only one...All partake and will partake of the glories of Jerusalem the Golden, the city on whose gates are written the**

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<sup>1</sup> The Dispensationalist would argue that there are land promises given to Israel but not to the church. But the land promises were a matter of the preserving of the seed (Christ). When Christ was born that aspect of the covenant was fulfilled and the wall of separation between the Jew and Gentile came down (Ephesians 2:11-21).

**names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel, and on whose foundation stones are engraved the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.<sup>2</sup>**

**So then those who *are* of faith are blessed with believing Abraham (Galatians 3:9).**

How are we blessed with believing Abraham? We are blessed because we exercise the same faith he exercised unto (that we might receive) justification before God. How easy it was for these Galatians, and us, to be enticed into thinking we can somehow augment (make better) what Jesus did for us on the cross...may it never be. We ought to love God, love our neighbors, and do good unto all. But all this follows justification by faith in Christ and His work on the cross. To place it before or mix it with the works of Christ places a curse on all of mankind. Paul would not submit to this for even an hour, nor should we.

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<sup>2</sup> William Hendriksen, *Commentary on Galatians and Ephesians* (Baker Book House, 1979), p. 125.

## Questions for Study

1. How were people in the Old Testament saved (page 2)?
2. Did Abraham believe in God the Father or Jesus (page 2)?
3. What does it mean that Abraham's belief was *accounted* to him for righteousness (page 2)?
4. What does it mean to be a son of Abraham (pages 2, 3)?
5. What must first be present before anything we do can please God (page 3)?
6. Under what conditions can doing good things be an insult to God and His Son (page 4)?
7. What is 'imputed' righteousness (page 4)?
8. Does God have special promises or curses for certain ethnic groups (pages 4, 5)?
9. Was the gospel preached to Abraham? How so (page 5)?
10. How are people blessed with believing Abraham (page 6)?