

**A STUDY IN GALATIANS**  
**Part 10 – “Partners with Abraham”**  
**Galatians 3:6-9**

Don Emmitte, Grace Restoration Ministries

TAKE YOUR BIBLES...

*Just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”? Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. 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.” So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. (Galatians 3:6-9 ESV).*

Having appealed to the Galatians’ Christian experience, Paul now directs their attention to the witness of the Scripture. His argument is that these also show that faith, not works, is the means of gaining a right standing before God. He begins with the testimony of the Old Testament concerning the faith of Abraham.

The question is very plain: *How does a man find acceptance before God?* Paul’s answer is consistently very plain: *it is only by faith.* None of the blessings of God have ever come to anyone because they observed the law. They have always come when they trusted Christ alone for redemption. In our verses today the experience of Abraham is used to confirm this truth.

It should not be a surprise that Paul turns our attention to Abraham. We know more about him than any other Old Testament character. No name was more respected among the Jewish people of that day. Having been stripped of almost everything by the occupying invaders, they could still proudly announce, *“But, we are the children of Abraham.”* Being able to trace their lineage to this spiritual giant gave them their basis for hope. They believed that their physical relationship to Abraham brought to them the blessings God had promised to him. Even today we find people trying to prove that they have a physical relationship with the Patriarch of the nation. Some have even made the mistake of contending that the white Anglo-Saxon race is the lost tribe of Israel. They use this “logic” to say the Caucasian race is superior to other races.

Paul did not deny that being the descendants of Abraham brought special covenants and blessings; however he contends that the real “children of Abraham” are those who share his faith in God. The one thing that marked Abraham’s life was his trust in God, so the thing that will mark the children of Abraham is their trust in God alone.

**NOTE:** The translation of verse 9 is the key declaration of this principle. The Williams translation is very helpful in using the preposition forcefully enough: *So the men of faith are blessed as partners with trusting Abraham. THIS POINTS US TO TWO PRINCIPLES.*

**FIRST, THE CHRISTIAN IS HIS PARTNER IN FAITH (vv. 6-7).**

*The basis on which God blessed Abraham is essential to understand. It was not based on circumcision.* The primary question Paul raises about Abraham is rooted in this point. **There**

were two possibilities: either God blessed Abraham on the basis of his circumcision; or, he was blessed on the basis of his faith. A careful study of Genesis reveals that circumcision was given as a sign of the covenant between God and Abraham. And the sign was given late in the life of the Patriarch. It was AFTER God had declared Abraham's faith (cf. Genesis 15) was to him accounted as righteousness. Therefore the blessings that God conferred on him were not based on his compliance with circumcision, or any other work of man it came as a result of Abraham's faith in God's declaration that he would have an offspring that would lead to a great nation. *Further, this declaration was not due to Abraham's moral achievement.* While Abraham was a good man, no one could label him as morally perfect after reading his life's story in the Scripture. He was capable and guilty of some serious moral compromises.

**LOOK CLOSELY AT VERSE 6: The argument presented here carries special weight with the Judaizers as it sets the precedents necessary for successful debate within rabbinical traditions.**

1. ***"Just as Abraham"*** – This part of the verse shows that the experience of Galatians and that of Abraham are essentially the same. The one serves to confirm the other.
2. ***"believed God"*** – This phrase construction adds weight to Paul's point that faith, not works, brought Abraham's acceptance from God. The word translated "believed" is actually a participle that means he believed and it had a lasting effect in his life. It is as if we were to say "I was born." The action of the verb "born" does have a beginning and it has continued action implied.
3. ***"It was counted to him"*** – This section really means it was "credited" or "accounted" to him. The thought is that God accepted Abraham's faith as equivalent to righteousness. Cole in his commentary writes: "Abraham entered into his particular blessing by realizing that he could do nothing for himself, confessing it to God, counting on God to do what he could not." This attitude alone was "counted" to him as "right standing." Any other attitude would have been no more than stubborn pride or self-righteousness.

Abraham's life is central in understanding Paul's point. The declaration is simply that he believed God and He counted it to him as righteousness. The first evidence of trust in God in the life of Abraham came in the Ur of the Chaldees. When God revealed himself to Abraham and called him to leave his home to go to a land he had never known before, Abraham obeyed. He was obedient because he believed God would take care of him and make good his promise to him. This journey was merely the path to the promise. All along the journey Abraham would be given other steps. Some he would successfully take, others he would fail miserably; however, at no time did his relationship with God change. The relationship was determined by his faith, not his actions. Finally, God did give him an heir. It was an unbelievable miracle that could not be attributed to anyone else but the Lord.

The Judaizers that had come to Galatia were offering the blessing that God gave to Abraham on a different basis. They were telling the Gentile Christians that special favor would come to them if they would be circumcised and live by the rules of the Mosaic Law. Nothing could be further from the truth. The participants with Abraham in the blessings of God are those who share his trust in the God of grace and covenant.

**SECOND, THE CHRISTIAN IS HIS PARTNER IN PRIVILEGE (v. 6).**

The greatest privilege granted to this friend of God was righteousness. It almost sounds anticlimactic, doesn't it? For from it!

The word "righteousness" (v. 6) is not easy to define or illustrate. Basically it is that which God will judge to be "right." It is that which will stand the test of time and divine judgment. God granted to Abraham that which made him acceptable. It assured him of approval when he would stand before God in judgment. Paul sees in this statement the summary of the whole Gospel. Men who have faith are credited with doing what only God can do – what Jesus has already done. He uses the word *justify*. It calls to mind a declaration of righteousness. That Abraham only saw through a dark shadow, the Galatians saw in a plain billboard. Jesus was then the plan and is now the plan of God to bring righteousness to men. **The real question now becomes why is this so important?**

1. ***It is important because it meets man's greatest need.*** As the finite creature who has accountability to the Creator, I need a righteousness that will assure me of acceptance and approval before the Judge of the universe. I find myself totally unable to accomplish this on my own. Every attempt I make is met with failure. The law proves this over and over again. I cannot become righteous in my own efforts to do or be good.
2. ***It is important because it provides the basis for a relationship with God.*** The life of Abraham is a wonderful saga of the developing relationship between him and the Lord. It shouldn't be lost on us that Abraham was considered "the friend of God." As a "friend" God listened to him intently. Do you remember the prayer of Abraham on behalf of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah? Abraham prayed for the mercy of God. Had he been able to find five righteous men in those cities, God had agreed to spare them the judgment. It finally reaches an apex when God asks him to sacrifice his son, Isaac.

I like what John Calvin wrote: *Faith is not a distant view but a warm embrace of Christ.* While Abraham looked forward to Christ's work, we look backward. Truly our faith is easier than his!